

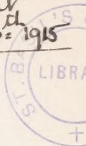
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COMMENTARY ON THE
SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS.
VOL. II.

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COMMENTARY ON THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS

BY
JOHN FISHER, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER

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THE FIFTH PENITENTIAL PSALM.

DOMINE EXAUDI.

PSALM ci (Part I)

FORASMUCH as this Psalm is longer than we may at this season conveniently as-soil or expound, therefore we shall this day declare to you one part of it, and reserve the other unto Sunday next coming. This part that we shall expound this day is divided into three. First the prophet maketh his petition and desireth meekly to be heard of Almighty God; second he sheweth openly his own wretchedness; and lastly he remembereth himself what he may do and how much, to obtain mercy and grace. Which three members I now, as in the person of us all, shall treat and speak of; and ye shall diligently give audience and bear it in mind.

O merciful Father of Heaven. Thine only begotten Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord, Which Thou sent down from Heaven into this world, to the intent He should teach and instruct wretched sinners the way of truth,—amongst all, He taught us that prayer is first necessary to every creature, and promised if we instantly ask anything lawful and necessary for us, it should be granted by our prayer. These be His words *Petite et accipietis, querite et invenietis, pulsate et aperietur vobis*: "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and the gate shall be opened to you." O my Lord, this Thine only Son promised, also we doubt not, we know right well His promise is true. Why? For He is both true and also Itself Truth. Besides this He is so entirely beloved of Thee, for Thou said of Him *Hic est filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene complacui*: "This is My well-beloved Son in Whom I have much pleasure." Thou gave in commandment, which¹ follow-

¹ that which.

eth, saying, *Ipsam audite*: "Give heed unto His doctrine, give audience unto Him." O my Lord God, my Maker, because that He made us this good and true promise I have very firm confidence and trust boldly for to ask Thine infinite mercy. For since that He is Thine only Son, most dearly beloved and sent down, of Thy charity, into this world for to teach what should be most profitable for us to do, also He knew well what thing was necessary and convenient and what was not for us. Moreover it was impossible for Him to beguile or say anything but truth. How and why shall I fear? For what cause shall I not trust that Thy goodness shall hear me, whatsoever I ask necessary for me in my prayer? For if Thy Son might have been evil-willed and would have deceived us, then peradventure we might have some mistrust; but in Him was all wisdom and providence. He is the profundity of thine inerrable wisdom, so that He knew what was profitable for us and what was acceptable to Thee. He was always willing and studious to give us instruction and learning; He died for our sakes, which is the greatest token of goodwill that may be. *Majorem enim caritatem nemo habet quam ut animam suam quis ponat pro amicis suis*: "The greatest charity and love that may be shewn is one friend willingly to suffer death for another." He of His own good will was nailed upon a cross, and so for our offences suffered that most shameful death, whereby we may know verily that He was always benevolent and willing to do for us. Therefore without doubt since that He taught us in this wise, we shall be heard if we pray to Thee.

But peradventure our sins and wickedness that we have done shall withstand and turn away Thy merciful face from us. O Blessed Lord, of a truth we oft have offended and grievously trespassed against Thy commandments, but again it is truth that Thy well-beloved Son taught not only them which be rightwise to pray, but also sinners. For unto whom belongeth these words *Dimitte nobis debita nostra*: "Good Lord, forgive our sins," but unto sinners? True it is, he taught both good and evil to pray. Therefore Thou mayst take Thy plea-

sure, it is Thy choice whether Thy goodness will punish and utterly cast away sinners for their offences and trespasses, or else hear their prayers and petition for the reverence of Thy Son, Which promised them to be heard and obtain their asking. It is little force to Thee, it skills Thee nothing, it is no point of Thy charge, whether we be saved or damned; Thou madest us of nought, and mayest deal with us as it pleaseth Thee. But, notwithstanding, the promise of Thy Son is greatly to be taken heed of. Why? For it belongeth both to Thine honour and also to His, and in no wise may be defiled or contraried without great confusion and rebuke unto them that loveth Thee. I therefore, made bold and strong in hope to obtain my petition, am come unto Thy goodness making my prayer to the intent that Thou wilt effectually hear me, saying, *Domine exaudi orationem meam*: "Lord hear my prayer effectually." Thou mayest hear my prayer and petition by shewing of Thine angels; and if Thy goodness will do so much for me, I shall be content, I shall be well at ease. Notwithstanding, I desire and ask more of Thee. The lively voice, or the voice spoken by the mouth of the person that is so grieved or diseased, moveth much more effectually the hearer than¹ it should be told by any other man. Thine holy doctor St. Jerome saith thus: "The effect of the word spoken by a man's own mouth hath a marvellous privy and hid efficacy or strength, so marvellous that I cannot tell what it should be called. Which be proved by the words of Æschines, a certain orator, that was exiled and caused to flee unto Rhodes by his adversary, called Demosthenes, an orator also; and there read an oration unto his scholars made by the said Demosthenes his adversary. They also praising the same oration greatly by his reading, he took up a great sighing and said, "What if ye had heard this my cruel enemy Demosthenes speak these words himself?" As who saith, a man's intent or mind spoken by his own mouth moveth more the hearer than¹ it were shewed and spoken by any other. Another example. At any season when it is

¹ than if.

shewn to us¹ of the beggars or poor folks that be pained and grieved with hunger and cold, lying in the streets of cities or good towns, full of sores, we hear it when it is told and somewhat be moved inwardly with pity and mercy; but if we will give heed and hear our own self the wailings, cryings, and lamentable noises that they make, we should be much more stirred to shew our pity and mercy on them: for no man else can shew the grief of the sick or sore person so well and with so effectual manner as he himself. Then since the miserable crying and wailing of those that suffer bodily pains and wretchedness may so much move the hearts of mortal creatures, I doubt not, good Lord, but Thou (Who art all-merciful) must needs be inclined to execute Thy mercy if my pitiful cry and petition may come unto Thine ears unto Thy presence. Therefore I join this to my petition: *Et clamor meus ad te veniat*: "Good Lord, hear my prayer and petition and grant that the inward intent of my prayer may come to Thy merciful presence."

But beside this, if Thou wilt vouchsafe to do so much as look to me-ward with the eyes of Thy grace and mercy, then shall I trust more and more to obtain mine asking. For if Thou both wilt understand and know my wretchedness and meekly take up my miserable calling and crying to Thee, and also behold the pitiful state that I stand in without Thy grace and mercy, I fear nothing, but I know well Thou shalt shew Thy merciful deed upon me. Who can be so hard-hearted, when he seeth a poor creature and heareth his pitiful and lamentable weeping and wailing, and also beholdeth the corrupt matter run down from his sores, to pass by and will not shew mercy upon the sore and sick creature? Our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, shewed that a certain man came down from Jerusalem into Jericho and fell among thieves, which both robbed and wounded him with many sore wounds, and so left him half-quick half-dead; a certain Samaritan coming beside, moved to shew pity, came nigh unto him and did bind up his wounds. We

¹ we are informed.

be in like condition; truly our soul, which hath a heavenly beginning, came down from Jerusalem (from Heaven) into this wretched body, bound and subject to all mutability (signified by Jericho), fell here among wicked thieves, the devils; they robbed and spoiled it from the garments of grace, and wounded it with many grievous and divers wounds of sins, so, leaving it half-quick half-dead, took away the life of grace and left it only in the life of nature. Therefore, Blessed Lord, be Thou to us a Samaritan, behold, draw nigh, and exercise Thy merciful deed on us wretched sinners. For that is the desire and petition which we ask of Thee, *Ne avertas faciem tuam a me*: "Turn not the face of Thy mercy and grace away from me."

But, for all this, good Lord, I fear that after Thou hast been merciful to me once, I shall fall again among those thieves the devils by mine own negligence; they shall spoil me again, then shall I be far in worse condition than I was before. Thine only Son shewed and taught that when a wicked and unclean spirit is once drawn out from a man, he never resteth but walketh about by places that be dry and without moisture, that is to say, by the hearts of those persons which be dry and without moisture of worldly and transitory pleasures, and when he can there find no rest, anon returneth to the place which he came from; and because¹ he should be more strong, bringeth seven other spirits with him more wicked than he. When they all be entered there, that man is far in worse condition than he was before. So, Blessed Lord, it is with us, we be dealt with in like manner: if these thieves, these wicked spirits, be at any time by Thy grace drawn away from us, within a while after they come again, they bring more with them, they also come with great strength to fight against our wretched and weak souls. Alas, good Lord, what shall we do, without Thou help us? How shall we resist and withstand so great and strong multitude? For if they overcome us, we be in worse condition than ever we were before. Because why? We shall be made more feeble

¹ in order that.

to withstand them, and also our wounds (our sins) being renewed shall be much more grievous; and lastly Thy goodness, which again we have offended by our unkindness, shall be the longer alienate and turned away from us, that peradventure when we have need to call for help Thou shalt not hear us because of our grievous offences. Therefore I, as in the person of us all, add to my petition *In quacunque die tribulor, inclina ad me aurem tuam*: "Whensoever, good Lord, I shall be troubled with these thieves, these devils, I beseech Thee incline Thine ear unto me, give me grace to withstand them." But yet, most good and merciful Lord, I fear myself, I stand in dread. I read that a certain woman of Canaan came far from her natural country to pray unto Thy Son for the health of her daughter, saying to Him these words: *Miserere mei, Domine, fili David, filia mea male a dæmonio vexatur*: "Lord, the Son of David, have mercy on me, my daughter is sore troubled and vexed of a devil." First I consider the labour that this woman took in her great and far journey. I consider her steadfastness, her strong mind, because she came out of her own country. I consider the pitiful cause she came for as a very mother to seek and ask help for her daughter. I consider the sore and great vexation of her daughter troubled and vexed of a devil. I consider her faith, for why she called Him Lord and the Son of David. I consider her motherly weeping and wailing, for ever she cried and followed Thy Son Jesus for help; she would not stint, and He gave her none answer. O woman, in what case were thou in then, how was thy mind when thou beheld and saw that blessed Lord turn away His face from thee, which over all¹ before was called so meek and merciful? It was no marvel, when she perceived that, though² she wept and cried upon Him more and more, like a woman. In so much the disciples of Thy Son Jesus were moved and in manner constrained to call on Him to shew His mercy at her petition; but He answered them, when they made intercession for her, that He was not sent down into this world but for the

¹ universally.

² if.

salvation of the House of Israel. O woman, when Thou heard tell and knew that neither thyself neither thy daughter were of the number that He should save and make whole, why did thou not then go thy way? Why died thou not for sorrow? But, for all that¹ Thy Son Jesus would neither make answer neither look upon her, neither also have pity when that His disciples made intercession for her, yet she fell down unto His feet, grovelling and prostrate upon the earth, crying, *Domine, adjuva me*: "Lord, help me." Notwithstanding, this blessed Lord, Thy Son Jesus, which to all others had been marvellously beneficial, and for a surety is the very Fountain of mercy and pity, used unto her this sharp and bitter word, called her a dog, like as in Him had been all cruelty and no pity nor mercy. He said *Non est bonum sumere panem filiorum et mittere canibus ad manducandum*: "It is not good to take the bread of children and give it dogs to eat." O good Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest what is profitable to every creature. Thou knowest that a weak and feeble person should be more easily treated and dealt with than a strong and mighty. Thy Son did prove this strong and faithful woman for our doctrine,² that we by her faith and patience should not despair although we be not heard as soon as we call. And at the last, when He had proved her so long, and she meekly acknowledged herself no better than a dog, unworthy to have bread, nevertheless as a whelp desired to gather up crumbs that fall under the boards of lords or great estates, He opened the doors of His mercy and pity and granted all her asking and said *O mulier, magna est fides tua: fiat tibi sicut vis*: "O woman, great is thy faith, be it to thee as thou wilt."

But I, Blessed Lord, am weak and fearful, I beseech Thee prolong not in such manner my petition, let me not tarry so long, defer not my hope and trust as thou did the woman of Canaan, but hear me shortly. *In quacunque die invocavero te velociter exaudi me*: "Whensoever, good Lord, I call to Thee for help hear me; grant shortly my petition."

¹ albeit.

² instruction.

We have spoken hitherto of our petition. Now we shall shew our wretchedness whereby the goodness of Almighty God may be moved to be merciful and grant our petition. The life of man is here but for a while, shortly it shall perish and be at an end; no space, no void time, no leisure can be had but always it draweth to an end; it cannot be at a point, it is never at rest, truly, one minute of an hour. Whether we eat or drink, wake or sleep, laugh or weep, ever our life here draweth to an end. Where be now the kings and princes that some time reigned over all the world, whose glory and triumph was lifted up above the earth? Where is now the innumerable company and puissance of Xerxes and Cæsar, where are the great victories of Alexander and Pompey, where is now the great riches of Cræsus and Crassus? But what shall we say of them which some time were kings and governors of this realm? Where be they now which we have known and seen in our days in so great wealth and glory that it was thought of¹ many they should never have died, never to have been out of mind? They had all their pleasures at the full, both of delicious and good welfare, of hawking, hunting, also goodly horses, goodly coursers, greyhounds and hounds for their disports, their palaces well and richly beseen, strongholds and towns without number; they had great plenty of gold and silver, many servants, goodly apparel for themselves and for their lodgings; they had the power of the law to proscribe, to punish, to exalt and set forward their friends and lovers, to put down and make low their enemies, and also to punish by temporal death rebels and traitors. Every man held with them, all were at their commandment, every man was unto them obedient, feared them, lauded also and praised them, and over all shewed their great renown and fame. But where be they now? Be they not gone and wasted like unto smoke? Of whom it is written in another place *Mox ut honorificati fuerint et exaltati, deficientes quemadmodum fumus deficient*: "When they were in their most prosperity and fame, anon they failed and came to

¹ by.

nought even as smoke doth." St. James compareth the vanity of this life to the vapours, and saith it shall perish and wither away as a flower in the hay season. Therefore since that the time of our life draweth fast unto an end, if we be not heard shortly and soon of Almighty God when we call for help, death shall come upon us or ever we can be succoured. For this cause, Blessed Lord, have in mind the shortness of our life here, and as soon as we call to Thee give audience unto us all. Of a truth all we may say, that followeth, *Quia defecerunt sicut fumus dies mei*: "Good Lord, hear shortly my petition whensoever I call unto Thee, for my days," my time in this life, "goeth away like smoke": the longer I live the more feeble I am.

Peradventure they that be mighty and noble men will at some season be as diligent as they can, and so diligent that by their importune¹ and often calling upon such as they have ado with, they may the sooner be sped in their cause: which daily we perceive, and see by them that follow the king's court or the prince's (with other²) for great and necessary matters. For the more diligent that a man be in giving attendance to call upon his cause, the sooner shall he have his intent; and if he be not always present and at hand of him to whom his matter is committed, calling busily for the speed of the same, it shall be longer ere he have his desire.

In the Gospel of Luke is spoken and told of a certain judge that neither dreaded God nor man, unto whom came a certain widow beseeching that she might have right and equity of the wrong done by her adversary. He refused and would not grant her justice, of a long season. And at the last, seeing that this woman would not leave but ever calling on him, he remembered himself and said: "Although I neither fear God nor man, yet forasmuch as this woman will not cease to call on me, I shall venge her quarrel, I shall see she shall have right." Take heed what the importune and never-ceasing labour in a great and necessary cause doth profit and avail. It is written *Labor improbus omnia vincit*:

¹ importunate.

² amongst others.

"Incessant labour" by the way of intercession "overcometh all things." So, merciful Lord, Thou desirest to have us importune in our prayers, and although of Thine own nature Thou cannot be but meek, notwithstanding, by our busy and importune prayers Thou art much more meek.

But, for all this, I lack strength in my soul; the sweetness of devotion is taken away from me, that anon I am made weary when I begin to pray. Why? For the strong parts of it, that is to say Understanding, Will and Reason which must be unto the soul as bones and sinews to succour it, be so utterly withered and dried up, that no manner of moisture of devotion is in them, even as they were toasted at the fire. Therefore, as one lacking the quick humour of devotion, I cannot long continue in prayer. *Et ossa mea sicut cremum aruerunt*: "For my bones (that is to say the strong parts of my soul) be dried away like unto the dross or scraps of tallow after it is clarified by the fire." I remember that is written in another place, of the fatness and moisture of devotion, *Sicut adipe et pinguedine repleatur anima mea*: "Grant me, good Lord, my soul to be replete with the fatness of charity, and also that the outward parts of my body may be fulfilled with good works." But, alas, woe is me now, the fire of unlawful concupiscence hath wasted and taken away from me all the fatness, all the sweetness of prayer, and made my soul dry and void from all moistness of devotion. For as the green grass or corn that now flourisheth, if it be not refreshed at some time with a dew or rain, anon it is smitten with the heat of the sun and waxeth dry even as hay; so my soul is dried up by the heat of unlawful desire, and all the sweetness of devotion is clean expelled from it, that not only the strong parts of my soul (understanding and reason) be made dry and dull, but also I myself in every part *percussus sum ut fœnum*: "Am smitten with the heat of temptation and withered as hay." But I am far in worse condition than is withered grass or hay. For although the green grass be dried up by the heat of the sun, yet it hath somewhat whereby it may be re-

freshed as long as the root is fast in the ground, by drawing up moisture out of the earth from the root into every other part; and as we see oftentimes when the green grass hath changed the colour after the earth be burnt, chined,¹ and chipped by the heat of the sun, as soon as it is watered with a shower of rain, within the space of one night it beginneth to quicken again and renew the² own colour. But nothing can be found whereof the soul may draw up and receive any moisture, any savour or any sweetness of devotion. If it should come from any place, it must be had from the heart. As our Saviour saith, *Bonus homo de bono thesauro cordis sui projert bonum*: "Every good person bringeth forth from his heart all goodness, nothing but good."—Truly the humour of good devotion must come from the heart, to the intent all the whole soul may be watered, may be refreshed and stirred to prayer, by it. Blessed Lord, how shall I do, for my heart is utterly void and lacketh this humour of good devotion, whereby not only my soul, smitten with the heat of unlawful and worldly concupiscence, is dried and withered away, but also *Arui cor meum*, "My heart is in like manner." And not without a cause. For how may this be, that an herb having no moistness may long continue green? Shall it not shortly wax dry and wither away? Also, everything that hath life, if it be not refreshed often with some nourishing, must needs be feeble and wither away. It shall dry and come to nought. The soul in like manner is nourished with a certain meat, and if it refuse and will not take that food, needs must it wax dry and lack good devotion. The meat according for the soul is the word of God, as it is written: *Non in solo pane vivit homo, sed de omni verbo quod procedit de ore Dei*. Man hath a body and soul, and as the body is refreshed with material bread, so the soul is nourished with spiritual food which is the word of God. This spiritual bread, the word of God, maketh the soul to be full of juice, full of the liquor of good devotion; and also it maketh the soul strong and hardy to withstand all tribulations. Who-

¹ split.² its.

soever eateth not of this bread shall wax lean in his soul, and at the last dry and come to nought. For because, good Lord, that I have not eaten this spiritual bread, I am blasted and smitten with dryness like unto hay, having no devotion. And also my heart is withered, of whom the sweet fruit of devotion should spring out. *Quia oblitus sum comedere panem meum.* The cause why: for I have been oblivious and forgotten to do after thine holy doctrine. To eat this spiritual bread is not only to hear the word of God. Many there be which hear the word of God but, notwithstanding, they eat it not, they do not receive it to the nourishing and refreshing of their souls. In like manner many doth hold in their mouths material bread and neither chew it neither swallow it down, and such doth not eat the bread material. Semblably many there be that receive this spiritual bread (the word of God) by hearing it spoken by the preacher, but they neither chew it nor swallow it down, that is to say, they do not thereafter,¹ for it savoureth not in their mouths. But contrariwise many eat the bread of the devil; they be fain and glad to hear his words that sound to naughtiness, and follow the same by ungracious custom of sin. Whatsoever he putteth in their mind by the way of suggestion sounding unto the perverse and unthrifty pleasure of the body, that anon they savour, and do thereafter with as great and diligent study as they can. But this is not the meat of the soul, it hurteth and is venom unto it, it doeth no good, it refresheth it not, it is a mortal infection and causeth the soul to die everlastingly; it maketh that the concupiscence of the flesh hath domination, and reason is set apart and laid under; where² contrariwise the very bread of the word of God maketh reason lady and ruler and the flesh to be thrall and as a servant. The word of God causeth all goodness in the soul, it maketh it moist and ready to spring in good works. The word of the devil maketh dryness, dull and sluggish to do anything that is good. The word of God is the defence from the heat of carnal desire. The word of the devil kindleth

¹ act not accordingly.

² whereas.

that heat. The word of God maketh the soul strong, and the word of the devil maketh it feeble and weak. The word of God causeth the flesh to obey and follow reason; and contrary, the word of the devil maketh reason to be obedient to the flesh. This is the thing, good Lord, that maketh me sad and sorrowful, forasmuch that I have rather given audience and followed the word and enticing of the devil. Therefore the strength of my soul, that is to say my reason, which should be to it as a post or pillar, hath inclined and been obedient to my flesh: whereof now I am sore a-dread. It followeth *A voce gemitus mei adhæsit os meum carni meæ.*

Now for a conclusion of this second part I will say thus. Forasmuch as our life here is so short and, without good fruit, waxeth dry as hay, we also be so feeble and weak that the strong parts of our souls (understanding and reason) be withered away; our souls made dry and smitten with the heat of carnal affection, our hearts void and barren of all virtue and devotion, insomuch that we have admitted and done after the word of the devil rather than of God, whereby our flesh is made as lord and ruler: sith we are in all these wretchednesses, the more needful and necessary for us is the speedful help of Almighty God.

Now the third part is yet behind, wherein we shall remember unto you the deeds of penance. There be three parts of penance which this holy prophet sheweth darkly and figuratively by the similitude of three divers birds, that is to say the pelican, the night raven, and the sparrow. First let us consider and shew the order and disposition of these birds. The pelican of his nature abideth in a desolate place where nothing in manner¹ groweth, the night crow abideth in old walls, and the sparrow maketh his resting-place in the covering of a house, or in the house-eaves. In a desolate and barren place is nothing that pertaineth to a building, save only the waste and void ground; in old walls, or in walls which be not perfectly made up, is somewhat framing upward towards the house or building; but when the

¹ practically nothing.

roof of the house is up and covered, then the building is finished and made perfect. Contrition, which is the first part of penance, is signified by the pelican. Confession, the second part, is signified by the night crow; and the third, that is satisfaction, is signified by the sparrow. The pelican, as St. Jerome writeth in an epistle unto a certain deacon called Præsidius, is of this condition; when she findeth her birds slain and destroyed by a serpent, she mourneth, she wailleth, she smiteth herself upon the sides, that by the effusion and shedding of her blood, her dead birds may be revived. Truly, they that are very contrite be of like condition. For when they search their conscience and find their children, that is to say their good works, slain and destroyed by the serpent, deadly sin, then they mourn and wail sore, they smite themselves upon the breast with the bill of bitter sorrow, to the intent the corrupt blood of sin may flow out. Of a truth, as soon as we commit deadly sin, all our good deeds done before be destroyed and stand in none effect. Holy St. Jerome, being in the wilderness, pained himself in like manner, and, fearing unless his sorrow was not sharp enough, he smote upon his breast with a hard flint stone. And what else meant the Publican which, anon as he entered into the Temple, remembering the greatness of his sin, did smite himself upon the breast, but that the corrupt blood of sin might be done away from his soul? When the sinner will order himself in this manner, that is to say ever be willing to be sorry for his offences and with the sharpness of his sorrow smite himself inwardly, to the intent the corruption of them may be done away, anon his good deeds which were lost by deadly sin shall be revived and be delivered and brought out from the bonds and prison of eternal death into a new light and new life. So that every contrite person may say *Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis*: "I am made like to the pelican by contrition."

The night crow or the owl, as saith St. Jerome, is of this condition, that as long as it is day she abideth privily in the walls or secret corners of some house and will not be seen. But when the sun is down and is dark as

in the night, anon she sheweth herself and cometh out from that secret place with a mournful cry and miserable and sorrowful lamentation. She never ceaseth so crying until that it be day again. To the which night crow may well be likened they that shew their minds by true confession of their sins unto priests; for when they were baptised and so made clean from Original Sin, the Sun of rightwiseness did rise upon them, gave light to their souls and so continued as long as they were without deadly sin. At that time no sorrowful remorse was in their conscience but all in rest and peace, like as in strong and sure resting-places. But, anon as they committed deadly sin, the Sun of rightwiseness went down and shewed no more light unto them, and their conscience was covered with the darkness of sin. Then they make a lamentable and mourning confession, shewing themselves culpable, and also express all their sins to a priest. And, that done, by the Sacrament of Penance the Sun of rightwiseness shineth again fresh on them. Whoever doth in this manner may well say this that followeth, *Et factus sum sicut nycticorax in domicilio*. By the sorrow for my sin and true confession made with penance for the same, I am clean without trouble in my conscience. I am in sure rest and peace, "even as the night crow when she is in that place of the house where it liketh her best."

After we have been sorrowful and contrite for our sins, and also have shewed them by Confession, it is needful to beware, to be diligent, and to take heed of the devil's snares, that by his crafty and false means he catch not and bring us again into his danger. We be warned of this by the holy Apostle St. Peter, saying, *Vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit quærens quem devoret*: "Awake, beware, and take heed, for your adversary the devil, even as a ramping and cruel lion, goeth about to seek whom he may devour." If we be diligent and give heed to avoid and flee from these snares of the devil, it may be said and spoken of us that is written by the prophet in another place, *Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo*

venantium: Although our bodies suffer pain in this life yet "our souls be delivered from the devil's snares, like as a sparrow is from the baits and traps of bird-takers that be about to catch her." When the sparrow suspecteth those snares or traps be laid for her on the ground, anon she fleeth up to the covering of the house or to the house-eaves, and if any time she be constrained by reason of hunger to come down again, yet, for fear, she will shortly return up; so that thither she will flee for succour and surety in her danger and peril, there she wipeth and feateth¹ her bill, there she preeneth and setteth her feathers in order, there also she bringeth forth birds, and there resting maketh merry as she can after her manner. In like wise they that desire and be about to make satisfaction for their offences must be wary and wise to keep themselves from the devil's snares and traps, whereof all the world is full; they must flee unto Heaven, set their felicity in Heavenly things and not in worldly pleasures. Which is a defence and covering of all the world. St. Paul saith *Nostra enim conversatio in cælis esse debet*: "Our conversation, our pleasure and felicity, should be in Heaven." Nevertheless, if at any season we come down, busy ourself to get anything needful for our bodies, let us shortly return, lest that we be taken in the snares of worldly pleasures. In every evil, peril and danger let us flee unto Heaven, set our pleasures on Heavenly things, and for the consideration and love of it, we shall purge ourself from sin. For why? Nothing that is foul and corrupted by sin may enter into the everlasting kingdom; we must preen and order all our feathers, all our acts in every condition, that we may be the more apt to flee up unto the place of everlasting bliss. There also we shall bring forth and hide our good works, which be our birds. Our Saviour saith *Thesaurizate vobis thesauros in cælo*: "Order and endeavour yourself to have treasures in the Kingdom of Heaven." And last, there let us rest in this life by true hope and trust and ever be occupied in the laud and praise of Almighty God, for it is written by the prophet

¹ wipeth.

Et laus ejus semper in ore meo: " I shall at all times love and praise Almighty God." Whosoever busieth themselves on this manner as we have said, shall make due satisfaction for his sins, and of very right may say what followeth, *Figilavi et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto:* " I have given heed, I have been wary of worldly conversation and pleasure, and as the sparrow flieth up to the house for her succour, so have I set my mind above in Heavenly things." Notwithstanding, they that take this way of penance shall have many foes, many enemies; for everywhere in every part of the world be backbiters. There was never creature born, were he never so good, excellent, and virtuous, were his deeds and work never so precious and noble, that might escape the slanders and backbitings of them which are backbiters and can say good by no man. For alway they that be evil-disposed be against them that be good and well-disposed. Ever they lay wait and, enviously fretting themselves, repugn against the manner of the penitent life, namely in those things wherein they be found contrary in their living. When also they see and perceive a man that hath changed his life, which before was to them a gentle companion for their appetite, and hath taken upon him a contrary manner of living, not according to their delight, it is no marvel though they forge matters and speak against him with all their whole mind and intent, and by their opprobrious and cursed sayings cause that person to be evil spoken of as much as lieth in them. They that delight in worldly conversation and pleasure doth praise and magnify those that doth the same. And, contrary, they hate all such as by contrition and true penance have forsaken and despised all worldly delectations. Which thing turneth away many from doing penance; they be ashamed to do that thing that should most profit them in time to come, for fear of the speech of people; they fear more the cursed sayings of wicked folks than they do the punishments of God, albeit He promised a great reward in Heaven unto us all for every opprobrious and malicious word that we suffer here patiently for His sake. All we therefore, being penitent

and suffering false accusings and shameful despites of wicked people, may say unto Almighty God, our rewarder and looker upon us, *Tota die exprobrabant mihi inimici mei*: " Mine enemies did scorn me many times and often." And not only our enemies doth so, but also they that sometime were our friends and wont to praise us. The world praiseth and loveth them which set their felicity and follow the vain and transitory joys of it, which also be ready at all times and seasons to eat, to drink, to laugh, to dance, to gambade,¹ to leap, and to sing. Also the world loveth them that be proud and jolly, full of words, variable in gesture and countenance, new-fangled in apparel, and always studious for new inventions; that I speak not² of them that pamper their bodies as gluttons, which use surfeits, drunkenness, uncleanness of body, perjuries, and dissimulations. They that have these manners pleaseth the world best. And, contrariwise, such as be studious to follow meekness, rightwiseness and truth, doth displease the world and them that follow the pleasures of it. It is written in the person of all such as be wicked and backbiters which conspire and would find the means to oppress the rightwise and well living person, *Circumveniamus justum quia contrarius est operibus nostris*: " Let us craftily deceive the rightwise man, for his works, his deeds, be contrary to ours." He liveth not as we do. Truly, whatsoever man or woman despise and set nought by worldly pleasure and conversation but follow the straight way of penance, shall oftentimes be evil said by, and many causes shall be imagined and conspired to put him down; peradventure of those that sometime would have spoken largely to his laud and praise, wherefore it followeth: *Et qui laudabant me, adversum me jurabant*: " They that sometime were my friends and would have said good by me," as long as I followed their sinful life. " did conspire and craftily lay wait to put me from my good purpose." *Quia cinerem tanquam panem manducabam*: " Because why? I did eat ashes as my bread." I often called to remembrance my sins with contrition and pen-

¹ gambol.

² not to speak of.

ance. Who else eateth ashes as his bread but the penitent? That thing which never goeth out of a man's mind but ever grudgeth and rolleth up and down in his conscience, it may be said he eateth it: for the which our Saviour Jesus Christ, alway being in mind to fulfil the will of His Father, calleth that busy remembrance to fulfil His Father's will His meat. He saith *Habeo alium cibum manducare quem vos nescitis*: "I have another manner meat to eat that ye know not." He meant it by¹ His busy remembrance, as we said before. Therefore it may be said that person eateth that same thing which he calleth alway to his remembrance. And what hath the penitent more diligently in his mind than the remnant of his sins, (considering the diversity of every offence) which may well be called ashes? For like as after the burning of wood or trees the substance remaining is called ashes, so after the heat of concupiscence (if we offend) what else shall we call that which abideth in the soul but ashes? What remaineth in the soul after the actual offence of pride, envy, fornication, or lechery but only the ashes of pride, envy, and fornication, which ashes the true penitent eateth as his bread by the continual remembrance of them? Also in this continual remembrance he lacketh no drink, for whosoever calleth to his mind all his sins with true penance shall scant keep himself from weeping. The weeping tears in another place of Scripture be called 'drink': *Et potum dabis nobis in lacrimis in mensura*. This drink, of a truth, comforteth much to slake and cool the heat of unlawful desire, and also quencheth the heat of fleshly volupty and lust. Therefore it is very necessary to the penitent. For oftentimes when we remember our old sins, a spark kindleth of the ashes, that is to say we have a delectation in them, which heat of delectation must be quenched with the drink of weeping tears. The true penitent may say that which followeth, *Quia cinerem tanquam panem manducabam et potum meum cum fletu miscebam*: "I have eaten ashes as my bread." I have consumed my sins by true penance, "and I have mixed

¹ of.

my drink with weeping tears." I have despised this world to the intent I may have hereafter the Kingdom of Heaven. Among all other, two things there be which may move the sinner, and not without a cause, to use this bread and drink now rehearsed. One is the indignation of Almighty God, the other is the greatness of his fall by sin. What creature can be but sorrowful and afraid when he considereth and remembereth the dreadful majesty of God, how much He hateth sinners, how grievously He beholdeth the sinner with His ireful countenance, ever ready to strike with the sword of His punishment, whose stroke causeth eternal death, a wound unable to be cured? And nothing else in the world may assuage or mitigate that sore stroke of everlasting death or punishment, but penance done with sorrow and weeping for our offences. St. Augustine sheweth the cause of his conversion was the consideration and remembrance of the everlasting punishment of God. St. Jerome also witnesseth himself that he chastised his body in the wilderness with fasting, weeping, and bitter mourning for fear of the everlasting pains of Hell. The true penitent wail-eth and weepeth for fear of the indignation and punishment of Almighty God, to Whom he may say what followeth, *Cinerem tanquam panem manducabam et potum meum cum fletu miscebam : a facie iræ indignationis tue*: " Good Lord, I have punished myself by penance, for fear of Thine indignation and punishment." The other is, as we said, his great fall by sin: which causeth and stirreth the sinner to do penance. For the farther that a man fall down by sin, the more grievously he offendeth the goodness of Almighty God and the sorer shall his punishment be. The greatness of the fall is to be considered by the greatness of the state, degree, honour, or learning of that person which offendeth; for the higher that a man be in honour the greater is his fall, the more is his trespass if he offends. Therefore let every sinner consider the greatness of his fall, let no creature think in himself and say, " I am not within holy Orders, I am not professed to any religion."¹ All

¹ Religious Order.

we be Christian people. Take heed in what degree we stand, what state is it to be a Christian man or woman. The least Christian person, the poorest and most low in degree, is nigh in kindred to Almighty God; he is His son and His heir of the Kingdom of Heaven, brother unto Jesus Christ and bought with His precious Blood; by the virtue of the same Blood washed in the Holy Baptism and often made clean again by the Sacrament of Penance; fed also and nourished with the Blessed Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. If any of us fall from this high state and degree, the greater shall be his fall into the deep pit of Hell, and sorer shall he be punished there than any Saracen or Jew. As saith the holy monk Arsenius, let no creature blame God if he be so punished. For if a craftsman constrain himself to the best of his power to raise up and convey a great stone into the highest part of a goodly building, he is greatly to be set by¹ and praised that he will so diligently be about to set it in so noble and honourable place, whereunto it were impossible for it to ascend by the² own power and strength. An³ peradventure in the meantime the same stone, for the great and overmuch weight, slip down from his hands, notwithstanding, the strength and good mind of the craftsman is not to be reprovèd. In like manner Almighty God is not to be accused if He at any time do His good will to lift us up into the high state of grace, and we in the mean season, by the weight of our forward and perverse will, fall down from His hands. Verily we ourself are to be accused and reprovèd for it, and not Almighty God; and our fall is the more bitterly to be wailed, that since He would lift us up, we by our own negligence and evil will be cast down. *Quia elevans allisisti me.* For Thou, good Lord, wouldest have "raised me up" from sin and set me in the high state of grace but by mine own negligence and perverse will, not in mind to forsake my sins Thou "let me slip down" from Thy hands.

Here endeth the Third Part of this sermon. Now

¹ esteemed.

² its.

³ if.

let us gather together and shew what we have spoken of in it. O most mighty Lord, I a wretched sinner have so much feared and dreaded Thine everlasting punishment for the greatness of my sin, that the remembrance of it hath been to me as bread to feed on, and my weeping tears as drink: made by contrition like unto the pelican, like unto the night crow by confession, and by satisfaction made like unto the sparrow. Insomuch that mine enemies slandered and spake evil by me; they also that sometime were my friends conspired against me. All these I suffer, Blessed Lord, to the intent I may obtain Thy grace and mercy. Therefore I beseech Thee hear me soon and execute Thy mercy on me.

Nothing may sooner move a man to be meek and shew mercy, as when the person which hath trespassed against him, lowly will submit himself, fall down at his feet, and meekly ask of him forgiveness, willing to know¹ his own fault and trespass. For the more gentle that a man is, the readier will he be to forgive him that will ask forgiveness. Which property we may see in unreasonable beasts. For of² great doctors it is spoken by³ the lion, that when he is disposed to be cruel and fight, if his enemy fall down and stoop to the ground, yielding himself as overcome, and in manner ask forgiveness, he will not after that be cruel upon him, but goeth away and forgiveth the injury. The same is expressed in metre by a certain poet,⁴ saying, *Corpora magnanimo satis est prostrasse leoni: pugna suum finem, cum jacet hostis, habet.* "It is sufficient for any beast that hath trespassed against the mighty lion to stoop and fall down to him; for by it his wrath is done away, and the trespass forgiven." And all other wild beasts, being nothing in regard to the lion but as his subjects, are so cruel and vengeful, that for no submission will leave their raging and woodness,⁵ which the same poet sheweth likewise in the matter: *At lupus et tristes instant morientibus ursi, et quæcunque minor nobilitate fera est.* "The wolf, the wrathful bear and every other wild

¹ recognize. ² by. ³ of.

⁴ Ovid *Trist III.* v. 33. ⁵ fury.

beast that is in manner vile and of no reputation, will ever venge themselves upon other which they may soon overcome." The greatest knowledge and experience¹ that may be of a noble man, constant of mind, without fear, casting² no peril, and trusting in his own strength, is if he will forgive and not shew his cruelty upon him that submitteth and acknowledgeth himself vanquished and overcome. Since Almighty God therefore is most noble, most constant, and so mighty above all other without fear, (He feareth no creature) it cannot be otherwise but needs He must be merciful and meekly forgive us wretched and of no strength, falling down at His feet acknowledging our own misery and asking of Him forgiveness. Forasmuch as Almighty God is thus merciful, let us all lowly humble ourselves before Him most meek, always one, unmovable, and without change or mutability, Whose power is everlasting in itself. Our weakness, our short time in this life fadeth and passeth away like a shadow, it withereth and waxeth dry as hay, and shall within a little while perish and come to nought. Let us all say unto Him *Dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt et ego sicut juncum arui, tu autem, Domine, in æternum permanes*: " Good Lord, since Thy time is everlasting, without mutability, without change, and we be so noughty,³ so feeble, we glide away as doth a shadow, and wither as hay, should it be a laud and praise to Thee for venging thyself and to destroy us? Should it not rather, Blessed Lord (if by Thy licence I might speak it) be to Thy dispraise? For anon as we be dead and gone out of this world, farewell any remembrance of us, we be soon forgotten. But Thou never can be put out of memory, the memorial of Thy merciful deeds is everlasting. If Thou wilt not shew Thy pity upon us wretches that are turned to Thee by penance and with weeping tears bow down to the feet of Thy majesty, before the throne of Thy mercy, what sinner hereafter shall have audacity (shall be bold) to ask mercy and forgiveness? Thine unmercifulness or cruelty shall cause

¹ proof and test. ² apprehending.

³ full of nothingness.

them to flee and be fearful to ask mercy, and so despair. But if Thou wilt vouchsafe mercifully to hear us at our calling, then doubtless every sinner shall at all times have in mind and shew the abundance of Thy suavity or meekness, and also shall openly tell over all Thy great and inestimable power, which is specially and namely expressed and shewed, when of Thy goodness Thou sparest and doest mercifully unto sinners. Thy Church customably prayeth unto Thee saying in this wise, *Deus qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas*: "Blessed Lord, Who sheweth Thine everlasting power namely and most of all in executing Thy mercy and sparing sinners." Notwithstanding, I say not but Thou must needs punish such as be obstinate and ungracious, not willing to turn them unto Thee by penance, but ever continue in their malice and sinful life. Thy prophet Jeremias threatened those evil-disposed people, saying, *Non flectetur neque parcat neque miserebitur eis*: "Thou shalt not be meek, Thou shalt not spare, Thou shalt never shew Thy mercy upon such obdurate sinners." Thy rightwiseness shall appear in them which since they have continued so long in their sinful life, and never would turn from it, shall of very right be punished and crucified in Hell eternally. But, Blessed Lord, I mean and speak of them that be penitent and acknowledge themselves guilty, also be turned to Thee with all their heart. It is written in the Book of Sapience¹ *Tu qui dissimulas peccata hominum propter pœnitentiam*: "Thou most meek Lord, Who in manner dost dissemble and will not know the sins of men that be penitent." *Et qui misereris omnium quia potens es*: "And shew Thy mercy on every creature, because Thou art almighty." I cannot see, of very right, but Thou must exercise Thy mercy in deed on all such as by true penance hath forsaken their sinful life. Therefore be meek and merciful to us Thy servants and beseechers, for the everlasting memorial of Thy blessed Name, also that Thy so merciful doing may be a memorial and had in mind time without end. Amen. *Memoriale tuum in generationem et generationem. Amen.*

¹ Wisdom.

DOMINE EXAUDI.

PSALM ci (Part II)

THE other part of this Psalm is more dark and hard to understand than is the first part of it, chiefly for the difficulty that is treated and spoken of in the same. It is diffuse¹ for such as be not practised and learned in holy Scripture to understand what is meant by "Sion" and "Jerusalem," with other old prophecies, when they be rehearsed and spoken of. Therefore it is needful that ye give the more heed and attend audience on your part, and I to apply myself and put-to the more diligence, to the intent these doubts or darknesses may be shewed and more clearly be made open what that they signify.

Oftentimes a rehearsal is made in holy Scripture of three noble places, which signify three divers kinds of people in three divers times. The first place is the mount Sinai, which betokeneth the people of the Jews, in the time of Moses' law. The second is the mount Sion signifying the Christian people, in the time of grace. The third place is the high celestial Jerusalem, which representeth the blessed people in the time of glory. First in the mount Sinai Moses' law was given to the Jews with great fear and dread. For, the third day before, all the people had monition and warning to prepare and make ready themselves to be hallowed, (that is to say two days washing their clothes and keeping themselves from the fleshly company of women) to the intent the third day they might be ready to come unto the mount Sinai, there to see and hear what was to come. Monition they had also not to come nigh the Mount or any part of it: upon this pain,² were it man or beast, it should be stoned or shot to death. After, when the third day came and all the people was ready, a dark cloud began to cover the Mount, out of which issued forth lightning and fearful thunder was heard. Also the sound of a great trumpet burst out and increased more and

¹ complicated.² under this penalty.

more by little and little. Our Lord came down upon the Mount in fire; from that fire ascended a great smoke on every part of the Mount, as it had been out of a furnace. Thus the Mount was made very fearful to come unto or to behold, both for the darkness of the cloud and fire within it, for the lightning and great smoke ascending on every side, and also for the thunder and noise of the trumpet. The people likewise were marvellously afraid insomuch they called upon Moses to shew what was best for them to do. Their desire was moreover that God should not speak unto them, for, if He so did, they verily thought to die for fear. Moses also himself was so afraid that as St. Paul witnesseth he said: *Territus sum et tremebundus*. "I am sore afraid inwardly and aghast outwardly." Then if he that was so familiar before with God, (by Whose commandment he did so many great and marvellous deeds in Egypt) were so afraid, no marvel if the residue of the people were sore afraid. But this fearful manner the Hebrews' law was given on Mount Sinai, that, because of so great fear and dread, the people should be the more wary to break the law given unto them. As Moses, their man of law, said, *Ut terror in vobis esset et non peccaretis*: "The law is given to you by this manner, to the intent ye should be afraid and not fall into sin." But forasmuch as our best and most loving Lord God delighteth more in those acts which we do lovingly with a good will, than in those that we be constrained to do by fear, of His nature also He is more ready to shew mercy than to do vengeance.

Why—for¹ it belongeth unto Him to shew mercy in deed. The prophet Isaie saith *Ulcisci vero peregrinum opus est ab eo*: "It is strange, and a deed in manner against nature for Almighty God to shew vengeance." It cometh not of Him so to do; the cause of His doing vengeance is the transgression of His commandments. He is sorry to be avenged upon any person: which Himself sheweth by His prophet in another place, saying *Illeu consolabor de hostibus meis et vindicabor in eis*:

¹ wherefore.

"I am sorry to take my pleasure, that is to say to be venged, upon mine enemies."

For these causes rehearsed He hath ordained another new law, not a law of fear and dread but a law of grace and mercy; which was given on Mount Sion, there being present the Apostles and Disciples with many holy women, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, which made ready themselves to receive this law, long continuing in prayer, as St. Luke sheweth: *Et hi omnes erant perseverantes in oratione cum mulieribus et Maria matre Jesu*: "All these were continuing in prayer with other holy women and Mary the Mother of Jesus." Upon whom the Holy Ghost descended in the similitude of fiery tongues and sat over them all. After that, they spake in many divers languages and preached incessantly the lauds of Almighty God, so that the people of every nation under heaven, so many as then were present, understood openly what every one of them said, and greatly marvelled that they spoke so boldly and cried without ceasing, insomuch one said *Quidnam vult hoc esse?* "What manner thing is this, what may this mean?" Another laughed them to scorn and said *Musto pleni sunt isti*: "They be drunken." But the effect of the thing proved evidently that the must was nothing in the blame, for St. Peter, one of the disciples of Christ, rose up from among them and shewed all the very matter in deed how it was, confirming the same by holy Scripture so strongly and so clearly that he turned unto the Faith that day almost the number of three thousand men and women. Besides these, our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ was offered up on the same mount; there also He exhorted the people many times; on the same likewise He wrought many miracles. For these causes specially, this Mount or Hill named Sion signifieth the Church of Christian people, like as the Mount Sinai betokeneth the Synagogue of the Jews. On the Mount Sinai was the law of fear and bondage given; on the Mount Sion the law of love and liberty was granted freely. Both these said laws were given the fiftieth day after the Paschal Lamb was eaten, in Moses' time a figurative lamb, and in the

time of Christ a very Lamb indeed, our Saviour Jesus Himself.

We said the third place is the Heavenly City Jerusalem, prepared in the most high mountains; which place without doubt is promised to all good and rightwise people for a reward of their good living in this transitory world, like as the earthly Jerusalem, a place of rest and peace, was promised to them that suffered patiently the great labours and storms in going over the Red Sea, and also took great pain in the desert. St. Paul saith *Dignus est operarius mercede sua*: "The workman that hath done his labour without murmur or grudge is worthy to have his hire, his reward." Therefore we must labour truly in the short time of this life, to the intent we may get and obtain after our labour and business done here an everlasting reward in the Heavenly country, in the celestial Jerusalem, where we shall be alway at liberty and rest, void from all manner of labour. We shall have there rest and peace without end. Jerusalem is as much as to say *Visio pacis*. "The sight of peace." Therefore in that Heavenly place we shall have in possession peace eternally without any manner of tribulation. First peace with ourselves, peace with our neighbours, and peace with God. There we shall see Almighty God, not as the Jews saw Him on Mount Sinai in a fearful similitude, neither as the Christian people saw Him on Mount Sion in the likeness of fiery tongues, but we shall behold and look upon Him even as He is, distinctly and clearly, face to face, without any other similitude or change. He shall be our law. Of a truth the old law given to the Jews by Moses at Mount Sinai was written in tables of stone. The new law given to Christian people by our Saviour Jesus Christ on Mount Sion, was written in the fleshly tables of the heart; but the law which shall be given to the people glorified is written in the mind of God.

St. Paul maketh mention of these three places rehearsed in an Epistle written unto the Hebrews, saying thus, *Non enim accessistis ad tractabilem et accessibilem ignem et turbinem et caliginem et procellam et tubæ-*

sonum: et verborum vocem, quam qui audierunt excusaverunt se ne eis fieret verbum: non enim portabant quod dicebatur, "et si bestia tetigerit montem lapidabitur": "Ye came not to see the palpable and accessible fire, storm, and dark clouds, neither to hear the loud blast of wind, the sound of the trumpet and voice of the angel speaking in the person of God, which those that heard it excused themselves because they might not abide for fear of the words that were spoken. Also ye heard not the decree comminatory which was 'any beast that toucheth the Hill or any part of it shall suffer death.' " Lo here is specified the Mount Sinai, whereupon Moses' law was given by a terrible and fearful manner as ye have heard. It followeth *Sed accessistis ad montem Sion*. Lo! here the second Hill is shewed, on the which the new law, the law of the gospels, was ministered. He added this more in the said Epistle *Et civitatem Dei viventis Jerusalem caelestem*. Lo! the third place, wherein although we be not as yet, notwithstanding, we have drawn towards it; insomuch that if we live after the law given to us by Christ our Saviour, without doubt we shall enter after this life into that everlasting Heavenly Jerusalem. For that Heavenly City shall be restored and reintegrated with good Christian people, as we declared in the end of the Fiftieth Psalm;¹ which thing the prophet David shewed by his words now pertaining to our purpose, saying, *Benigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua Sion: ut edificentur muri Jerusalem:* "Blessed Lord, be merciful and with a good will shew Thy mercy upon all Christian people, that the number of Thy glorified servants in Heaven may be restored and fulfilled again."

Ye perceive now by the words that we have spoken how these three divers places signify three divers kinds of people in three divers times. First, the Mount Sinai signifying the Jews; Sion, Christian people; and Jerusalem, which representeth the people hereafter to be glorified in Heaven. The three divers times ye have also. First in the time of the Jews, which is done and

¹ see p. 117.

past, was great fear and dread of the grievous punishment of God. In the time of the Christian people, which is now, is great hope and trust of forgiveness, for the excellent treasure of grace and mercy of God. But in the time of those that shall be blessed everlastingly, which is yet to come, shall be the surety of the reward by confirmation of eternal and incessant joy. Let us therefore make our prayers unto our blessed Lord God, to the intent we may understand by these things that we have spoken, the other part of this Psalm to come.

The more that our prayer is grounded in charity, the sooner it shall be heard of Him Whose commandment is all charity. In the first part of this Psalm every man prayed for himself. After that, now in this second part, we be taught every man to pray for his neighbour and for the whole Church of Christian people. Almighty God knoweth, to Whom nothing may be hid, how great need we have to pray. Which necessity peradventure our Lord shewed when He slumbered or slept in the ship. St. Mark sheweth in a Gospel, a great storm or tempest of wind was upon the sea in the time when our Saviour Jesus was sailing upon it, and the ship wherein our Lord slept was almost drowned with the floods and troublous waves. But an¹ we take heed and call to mind how many vices reign nowadays in Christ's Church, as well in the clergy as in the common people, how many also be unlike in their living unto such as were in times past, perchance we shall think that Almighty God slumbereth not only, but also that He hath slept soundly a great season. No order, no integrity is now kept; it seemeth Almighty God to be in manner in a dead sleep, suffering these great enormities so long. Now we must do as the disciples did then in the ship; they awaked Jesus their Master from sleep with cryings and great noises that they made, saying *Magister, non ad te pertinet quod perimus?* "Master is it Thy will, belongeth it unto Thee, to see us perish?" In like manner let us raise up Almighty God by our prayers and meekly ask His help. Our Saviour Who redeemed us with so great a price may not

¹ if.

think that it belongeth to Him to see us perish, neither to suffer the ship of His Church to be so shaken with many great and ragious floods. He heard the petitions of them who then were not redeemed by His Passion. For at their calling and desire, rising up, He threatened the sea and the wind: wherewith anon the tempest ceased and the sea was mild and calm. Let us also call unto Him. Truly He is not far from us: these be His words: *Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem sæculi*: "Behold I am with you at all times continually unto the world's end." Therefore go we unto Him with full hope and trust to obtain our petition. Let us call upon Him by our prayers, saying, *Tu exurgens, Domine, misereberis Sion*. As we might say: "Blessed Lord, Thou in manner forgettest, Thou dost dissemble, peradventure Thou sleepest now; yet, for all that, we trust verily that as soon as Thou shalt rise up, Thy will shall be to exercise and shew mercy upon all the Church of Christian people. Behold with how many ragious floods this ship, Thy Church Militant, is tossed to and fro. Our religion of Christian faith is greatly diminished, we be very few, and whereas sometime we were spread almost through the world, now we be thrust down into a very strait angle or corner. Our enemies hold away from us Asia and Africa, two of the greatest parts of the world. Also they hold from us a great portion of this part called Europe which we now inhabit, so that scant the sixth part of that we had in possession before is left unto us. Besides this our enemies daily lay a-wait to have this little portion. Therefore good Lord, without Thy help, the name of Christian men shall utterly be destroyed and fordone. But, truth it is we have deserved more grievous punishment for our sins than ever did Sodom and Gomorrah, sometime two great cities, which were drowned when Thou shewed vengeance upon them for their grievous offences. Notwithstanding, Blessed Lord, exhibit that mercy upon us, which Thy will was to have shewed upon the same cities at the instance and prayer of the holy father Abraham. Albeit, good Lord, it is not unknown to us that all we be sinners, yet

we doubt not we are in a surety that many good and rightwise persons be in Thy Church Militant here. Thou made answer unto the prophet Elias, what time he thought no more left of the prophets which worshipped Thee but himself only, that Thou hadst yet seven thousand which never did sacrifice nor bowed down their knees unto Baal. Ah, good Lord, if there be seven thousand good Christian people, have mercy upon all the other multitude, namely for the love of them, for Thou promised Abraham to shew mercy unto those five great cities if he could find fifty rightwise persons in them. Also if there wanted five of that number. And further, if he could find but forty, Thou wouldst for their sakes spare all the residue. Truly the charity of Abraham was great which for all these would not leave and go from his cause into another matter, but rather came more nigh by little and little, ever meekly calling upon Thee to shew mercy, descending from the number of forty to thirty, from thirty to twenty, from twenty to ten. So if he could find ten good and rightwise persons, his petition was Thou shouldst not destroy those cities for the love of them. And Thou, Blessed Lord, mercifully granted his asking. Thy mercy is, and at all times hath been, so great and bountiful to wretched sinners. Thou dost not ask ten rightwise persons and no less in number. For why? One rightwise man shall be heard of Thee for an innumerable multitude of people. Witness Thyself by the prophet Ezechiel, saying *Et quæsiui virum de eis qui interponeret sæpem et staret oppositus contra me pro terra ne dissiparem eam: et non inveni*: "I made inquisition, I sought one man amongst them all, which in manner should make a hedge, that is to say should be a defence, and stand right against me to make interpellation for the earth, to the intent I should not destroy it: and I could find none such." O singular and great mercy of God to all sinners! One rightwise person among all the people shall be graciously heard for all the other multitude beside! Is there not, good Lord, one rightwise person in all Thy Church? Else God forbid, namely since it was promised unto St. Peter. *Non deficiet fides*

tua, Petre: "Peter, thy faith shall never fail," it shall never be at an end. Therefore if many be rightwise, good Lord, be merciful and exercise Thy mercy on us for their sakes. Our own cause is now purposed and shewed unto Thee, we speak for ourself, and although we be but ashes and earth, also wrapped in many grievous sins, yet, Blessed Lord, vouchsafe, give us leave, to speak unto Thy Highness in this matter. If there be many rightwise people in Thy Church Militant, hear us wretched sinners for the love of them, be merciful unto Sion, that is to say to all Thy Church. If in Thy Church be but a few rightwise persons, so much the more is our wretchedness and the more need we have of Thy mercy. Therefore, merciful Lord, exercise Thy mercy, shew it in deed upon Thy Church. *Quia tempus est miserendi ejus.* For, in so great scarceness of rightwise people, "time is to show mercy upon it." Call to remembrance Thy manifold and great merciful deeds, which be everlasting, like as Thou Thyself was at all times ready to execute mercy. Truly, as Solomon said, *Omnia tempus habent:* "Everything hath a time." And Thou, good Lord, art wont to shew mercy in time convenient. This is Thy saying: *In tempore accepto exaudivi te:* "I gave audience unto Thy petition in an acceptable time." The time of the old law, time of cruelty, rigour and vengeance hath been in time past. For St. Paul writeth *Irritam quis faciens legem Moysei sine ulla miseratione duobus aut tribus testibus moritur:* "In the time of Moses whosoever broke his law, two or three bearing witness of that transgression, should suffer death without mercy." Lo! in that time no mercy was shewed. The adulterer, the wilful manqueller,¹ or any other transgressor of Moses' law, if two or three bare witness in the same, was not spared nor pardoned, but without mercy should suffer death. Notwithstanding, the time is now changed. Now is the fulness of time wherein the gates of Heaven be made open, and the treasure of grace and mercy as a fountain ever springing is shed forth plentifully upon every kind of people: of the which time St.

¹ manslayer.

Paul speaketh, saying *Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis*: "Behold, take heed, now is the acceptable time, now be the days of soul's-health." Now in the time of the new law forgiveness was granted mercifully of our Saviour Christ to the thief, a manqueller, in the last hour of his death, also to the woman taken in adultery, with many others; wherefore, if Thy mercy ought to be shewed at any season, it must specially be shewed now in this time of mercy. When cruelty was abundant, if at any season Thou couldst not, of Thy benignity, but needs must exercise Thy mercy, much more it is to be done now when grace is abundant and so plenteous. *Quia venit tempus*: "For the time" of grace and mercy "is come and ready at hand." Yet another reason, good Lord, with Thy licence, which should somewhat stir Thy goodness unto mercy. Of a truth amongst us Christian people some be so light and frail of themselves that anon with every blast of temptation they be overthrown. They will not in any condition resist and withstand sin, but follow the caduke¹ pleasures of this world, the filthiness of the flesh. Sometimes they do after and follow the flattering persuasions and impulses of the devil, and be right glad so to do. Whom the prophet compareth to dust, and not without a cause, saying *Tanquam pulvis quem proicit ventus a facie terræ*. Such light and evil-disposed people of the world be in comparison "like dust that is soon blown away from the ground with every blast of wind." Some also be of another disposition, which although they be many times overthrown by the sudden blast of temptation, notwithstanding, they rise again shortly, washing themselves with the waters of weeping tears, and by bitter compunctions of penance making them strong and tough: like as dust, when it is tempered and made moist with water, waxeth tough in manner as earth and clay, so that then it cannot lightly be blown away with a blast of wind. Albeit such persons be not very strong of themselves, neither long may withstand temptations without the help of more stronger than they be. Certainly a wall made of earth

¹ unstable.

only without stones is but a small and feeble defence; likewise they that by penance have consolidate themselves shall be shortly won and overthrown, if stones be wanting, that is to say, if stronger in the Faith, more constant in good works, erect and set upon a sure foundation of stone, be not present. Such manner strong and constant people doth bolster and hold up both themselves and others in Christ's Church, they be like unto pillars. Were not the glorious martyrs of this manner, who shed their blood for our Saviour Jesus Christ's sake? Also the holy confessors and preachers of Christ's faith, holy virgins who kept themselves chaste and undefiled for the love of Christ. These, like hard stones might never be grieved and blown down by any craft of the devil, or by any sudden blast of temptation might be moved from their constancy. But, good Lord, these stones pleased Thine angels who minister and do service unto Thee, so much that now they be assumpt and taken them up into the building of the High City, Jerusalem. And we that are the remnant, being without strength or might, and left behind, are very feeble and weak, lightly overthrown with every blast of temptation. For this cause, Blessed Lord, now is the time to execute Thy mercy in deed upon Thy Church, since the pillars whereby it was sustained and holden up be taken away. *Quoniam placuerunt servis tuis lapides ejus.* If these stones be withdrawn, what remaineth but soft earth, which with every blast of wind is soon blown away, if it be once dried? Truly this earth, these brittle bodies of ours, will soon be dried up from doing good works, without thou be merciful, good Lord, and soon make them moist with the dew of Thy grace. And if it be Thy pleasure so to do, then shall the fountains of weeping tears gush out and the earth, (that is to say, we wretched sinners) shall be made strong more and more by compunction and weeping for our sins, not apt to be blown down with every blast of temptation: which shall be great joy to Thy servants, thine angels, that also are very joyful and glad of one true penitent person. Christ our Saviour said *Gaudium est coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente*: "It is

great joy to all the angels of God of one sinner that hath forsaken his wicked life, and with a good will doth penance for the same." If we once be made moist and tough in this wise, nothing shall then be wanting but the heat of Thy charity, whereby we may be decoct¹ and made hard as stones, that is to say, more strong and steadfast in faith and good works. Such as shall preach Thy Gospel through all the world must be very strong and constant. Which thing is yet to come, as many of our holy doctors bear witness. For our Lord, Thy Son Jesus Christ, said *Prædicabitur hoc evangelium regni in universo orbe in testimonium omnibus gentibus*: "The Gospel of the Heavenly Kingdom," the order and law of Christ's faith, "shall be preached and taught through all the world, in witness to all people." And, that done, the world shall be at an end. Lo, the words of our Saviour. The world shall not be at an end till His law be taught over all. And as St. Austin witnesseth, it is not yet performed through all Africa; nor unto this day it is not fulfilled through all the Greeks' land, as Origen beareth witness. Wherefore St. Austin upon a season, writing to a certain man named Hesychius, shewed that the preaching of Christ's Gospel through the world, also that all people shall be turned to the faith of Christ, and Christ's Church shall be dilated and increased through the world, is yet to come. Which St. Thomas confirmeth in the first Question of the first Part of his Summa. But, Blessed Lord, whom wilt Thou depute and set to do this great ministry, to preach Thy laws through all the world, without Thou exercise mercy shortly? For they that sometime were able to perform the thing indeed, be now taken away (as we said) into the Heavenly Jerusalem because they were so pleasant in the sight of Thine angels. Also they seemed and were very apt indeed unto the supern² and Heavenly Jerusalem. Blessed Lord, we know well Thy power is Thou may, when it shall please Thee, create and make new stones of the earth left behind. Thou may make of us, now being alive, as strong and bold to show Thy faith

¹ baked.² on high.

and commandments as ever were before in time past. This earth is acceptable to Thine angels, but for a truth it shall be more gracious and acceptable if Thou wilt put-to and augment it with Thy grace. Therefore now shew Thy mercy upon Thy Church Militant here on earth; for, Blessed Lord, Thy servants, that is to say Thine angels, shall be merciful to it, they shall for the love of our nature pray to Thy Highness for the whole congregation of all Christian people. *Et terræ ejus viserebuntur.* Found Thou many stones, that is to say much constant people, when Thou began to edify Thy Church? Were not they which Thou did set in the foundation, soft and slippery earth? Yes, truly, unto the time Thou made them hard as stones by the virtue and strength of Thy burning charity. Peter, the head of all the others, at the fearing of one hand-maid or woman-servant, did he not give place and denied Thy Son Jesus Christ His Master? Was not also contention and debate among other of the Apostles, which of them should be chief and have the sovereignty among them? Further, all they fled for fear when their Master Christ was taken and brought to judgment. Lo how great pusillanimity, cowardness and unsteadfastness was in them! But as soon as the heat of Thy charity descended upon them in the similitude of fire, they were then made so constant and sure in their minds that, from that time forward, by no dread, threatening, nor persecution they feared to shew Thine embassy¹ and commandment pronouncing and expressing Thy Gospel to kings, princes and other wise men of this world; whom also they overcame by the virtue of Thy word and turned innumerable to the faith and acknowledging of Thy most holy Name. So, good Lord, do now in like manner again with Thy Church Militant, change and make the soft and slippery earth into hard stones, set in Thy Church strong and mighty pillars that may suffer and endure great labours, watchings, poverty, thirst, hunger, cold and heat, which also shall not fear the threatenings of princes, persecution neither death, but alway persuade and think with

¹ embassy, commission.

themselves to suffer with a good will slanders, shame, and all kinds of torments for the glory and laud of Thy holy Name. By this manner, good Lord, the truth of Thy Gospel shall be preached throughout all the world. *Et timebunt gentes nomen tuum, Domine, et omnes reges terræ gloriam tuam.* Whereby not only the vulgar and common people shall fear Thy Name, "but also all kings and princes of this world shall dread Thy magnificence and glory."

All fear of God, also the contempt of God, cometh and is grounded of the clergy; for if the clergy be well and rightfully ordered, giving good example to other of virtuous living, without doubt the people by that shall have more fear of Almighty God. But contrariwise, if the clergy live dissolutely, in manner as they should give no account of their life past and done before, will not the lay people do the same? It is to be thought they will. And what followeth? Truly, then they shall set little or nought by Almighty God. Therefore by us of the clergy dependeth both the fear of God and also the contempt of God. For, of a truth, if every person of the clergy from the highest degree unto the lowest were able and worthy to occupy their rooms and places, every man according to his degree, and every one of them would execute all that pertaineth to his office quickly, without feigning or partiality, and with ardent faith, then the most hard-hearted creature that might be found among all people could not but love and dread our Lord God. Also by their good and virtuous living, they should in manner be compelled to the serving of Him. O blessed and happy be those persons that at any season shall see this thing indeed, that is to say, which shall behold Thy Church Militant once set in a right order through every degree! O most merciful and blessed Lord, make once an end and finish the building of Thy Church that Thou beganest a long time past, that now a great while hath suffered much wrong. Exercise Thy mercy upon the ground work of it, upon our fragility, that according to the words of St. Paul, *Superædificati super fundamentum apostolorum et prophetarum: ipso summo angu-*

lari lapide Christo Jesu in quo omnis ædificatio crescit in templum sanctum in Domino: "We may be super-edificated upon Christ, the very Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, joined unto Him the most high Cornerstone, in Whom and by Whom began and increaseth every edification and congregation of Christian people in our Lord." Then without doubt all people shall fear the excellence of Thy holy Name. All kings and princes shall glorify and worship Thee with all their true and holy service. A thousand Paynims, Saracens, and Jews shall be turned unto Thee; like as when the first foundation was set of Thy Church, sometimes three thousand, now five thousand, now more, now less, were then converted unto the Faith. If it were then so profitable when the first building was begun, how profitable can be thought shall it be when all is perfectly finished and performed. *Quoniam ædificavit Dominus Sion.* That is to say, our Lord hath performed, finished and set a due order in all His Church, whose glory and worship standeth not in silk copes of divers colours craftily broidered, neither in plate of gold or silver, nor in any other work or ornament, be it never so richly garnished with precious stones. These rich jewels in the old Temple were necessary to be had and used for the apparel of the bishop and other priests ministering the old law. But sith it is so all their doing was but only a shadow and figure of things to come, therefore now we may not seek the outward glory and worship of the body, but only the inward honour and profit of the soul. The thing that was signified in the old law by gold is cleanness of conscience; and by precious stones, virtues of the soul. As St. Paul witnesseth, saying *Gloria nostra hæc est, testimonium conscientie nostræ:* "Our joy is the testimony of a clean conscience": which joy without fail¹ shone more bright in the poor Apostles than doth now our clothes of silk and golden cups. Truly, it was a more glorious sight to see St. Paul, who got his living by his own great labour in hunger, thirst, watchings, in cold, going woolward,² and bearing about the Gospel and law of Christ both

¹ doubt.² in garb of penance.

upon the sea and on the land, than to behold now the Archbishops and Bishops in their apparel, be it never so rich. In that time were no chalices of gold, but then was many golden priests; now be many chalices of gold, and almost no golden priests. Truly, neither gold, precious stones, nor glorious bodily garments be not the cause wherefore kings and princes of the world should dread God and His Church; for doubtless they have far more worldly riches than we have. But holy doctrine, good life and example of honest conversation be the occasions whereby good and holy men (also wicked and cruel people) are moved to love and fear Almighty God. Cruel Attila feared Leo the Pope, wicked Totila dreaded St. Benedict the Monk and Theodosius the emperor feared St. Ambrose, and why? Truly, because they heard their doctrine, and saw their lives so good and honest. O blessed Lord, how glorious and beautiful should Thy Church be, if it were garnished and made fair with such virtuous creatures! For then should all people fear Thy holy Name, and all kings and princes should dread Thine excellent glory, if Thou wouldst edify and ornate Thy Church on this matter. *Videbitur in gloria sua*: Then shall it be seen in a shining garment of divine grace, gilt with the golden wisdom of holy Scripture, and garnished round about with all manner precious stones for the diversity of virtues. Which glory shall blind the worldly sight of kings, it shall turn the hearts of princes from voluptuous delectations, and pierce through unto the minds of all people much more than all the riches of this world. The holy Apostles were glorious not by gold or silver, silk or precious stones, but only by their virtues. St. Peter said *Aurum et argentum non est mihi*: "I have neither gold nor silver." Notwithstanding, in the Name of Christ he made a lame man to go, also raised from death to life a dead woman. Paul in like manner, who had no worldly riches but got his living with his own sore labour, made whole one that was born lame into this world, and delivered another who was vexed with a wicked spirit, by calling upon the same Name Jesu. St. John, the elect virgin of God,

by his prayer turned branches of trees into gold; he drank venom and poison without hurt, he restored many dead folks to life again. St. Bartholomew, in the presence of King Polemius, by his prayer to God caused a horrible and fearful devil to go out from an idol. The holy Apostles were endued with these and many more marvellous acts, which Almighty God wrought in them by their prayers. Our blessed Lord gave no heed to the goodly apparel of their bodies, for they had none such, but He regarded only the cleanliness and fairness of the soul; that is to say, He did behold their steadfast and grounded faith; both hope and charity was in them, they were shining in faith, steadfast in hope, and burning in charity: whosoever had so great faith, all things should be possible for him to do. For our Saviour Christ said *Si fidem habueritis sicut granum sinapis diceretis monti: transi hinc: et transibit, et nihil impossibile erit vobis*: "If your faith were like unto a mustard seed corn" (which is little in quantity, betokening meekness; it is also biting and sharp in the mouth, signifying fervent charity), "ye might say unto a mountain, 'Remove and go from hence,' and anon at your commandment it should so do; nothing should be to you impossible." Good Lord, of whom had the apostles so great faith but only of Thee? They said *Domine, adauge nobis fidem*: "Lord, increase our faith." Forasmuch as Thou art the same God, and alike plenteous in mercy as ever Thou wert, now shew mercy upon Thy Church afresh, for it is time so to do, since our faith beginneth to fail and wax scant. Make perfect the building of it. Grant that it may shine in glory. Augment and increase the faith of Thy Church, whereby it may be graciously heard of thee, and work miracles, to the intent that all people should fear Thy blessed and holy Name, and kings of the earth dread Thy glory. So that in conclusion all the world may love Thee, worship Thee, and fear Thee, saying *Quia Dominus aedificavit Sion quae nunc videtur in gloria sua, respexit in orationem humilium et non sprexit precem eorum*: "Our Lord hath edified and built His Church strongly upon a sure foundation; which now is

seen in wealth and glory endued with many noble virtues. He hath also looked upon the prayer of meek people and granted their petition."

Now followeth the second part, wherein we be taught to move the goodness of God unto mercy, by the everlasting remembrance of His benefits. Of a truth a great part of recompense for a good turn done to any person is not to forget it, but rather have it continually in remembrance. One of the greatest unkindnesses that may be is this, if we forget and put out of mind kindness and beneficial gentleness shewed unto us. Nothing may sooner remove and put away noble and liberal minds from us. And, contrariwise, he that will remember a good turn or benefit is worthy to have gentleness and liberality shewed to him. And what shall we do, what recompense shall we make for the great benefit given to us, that is to say, for this merciful erection and building of Christ's Church, to the intent it may ever be had in memory not only of us, but also of all that shall come after us? We shall write this benefit, and so leave it in perpetual memory. This is the most sure way of all other to cause a thing long to be had in remembrance, that they which shall come after us may know the very truth of the great goodness and mercy of God shewed in our days. For Moses left in holy Scripture many marvellous and wonderful things the which Almighty God wrought in him for the erudition of the Jews. And if he had not so done, peradventure we should now not have had knowledge of them. Also the holy Evangelists left behind the Gospels written by them of Christ's miracles shewed here on the earth, ever worthy to be had in mind, which perchance we should not have known if their writings had not been. Therefore sith our Lord God most beneficial hath given to mankind so many great benefits, both in the old law (the time of Moses), and in the new law (the time of Christ our Saviour), after that, redeemed man with the most precious Blood of His only begotten Son, founded and endued the Church of Christ with so wholesome doctrine, and established the same by shewing of so many great miracles, also by the death of

many holy saints; further, since He is about to bring our souls to Him by so many divers means, notwithstanding we slip down from His hands overthrown and oppressed by the great weight of our sins into the foul clay and filthiness of worldly concupiscences, if He now will vouchsafe after so many unkindnesses shewed on our part to execute His mercy again upon us, were not these great benefits worthy never to be forgotten? Should they not be commended and left in perpetual writings to the laud of the great mercy of God? Therefore *Scribantur haec in generatione altera, et populus qui creabitur laudabit Dominum*: "Let them be written, ever to be had in mind of other generations, that all Christian people to come hereafter" may, by those manifold benefits given unto us, "laud and praise Almighty God." An evil tree may bring forth no good fruit: then thus, the people which is once evil-disposed and drowned in the malice of sin, how may it be thought that the posterity of them shall be good, without Almighty God make it of nought? Our Blessed Lord is of power to raise up and make of stones as good people as He would have. Sith we now be wrapped in so many greivous sins, the people who hereafter shall come of us, cannot be good and well-ordered, without that Almighty God make them of nought? And after, when that people shall know Thy Scripture, both our filthiness and their own cleanness, also our wretchedness and their felicity, how much shall they be 'bound to God and how great laud shall they give unto Him? For, of a truth, no man can know the value¹ sufficiently of a great gift or benefit, which knoweth not how great hurt others have suffered for lack of it, and also what damage himself should endure if he wanted the same. Therefore *Populus qui creabitur laudabit Dominum*: "All Christian people hereafter to come, reading and understanding the great benefits given by Almighty God in our days, shall laud and praise Him in their time," and not causeless. But wherefore shall they praise our merciful Lord? *Quia prospexit de excelso sancto suo*: Surely "because

¹ value.

He looked down mercifully upon us from heaven." Why so? Doth not God see all that we do? Is not everything naked and open to His sight? What needeth then to say "He looked down from His high holy place?" Peradventure because '*prospicere*' is to look afar. Truly, the more grievously that sinners have offended and trespassed against Almighty God the further they be gone away from Him. For this cause. Sith after the great innumerable benefits given of our merciful Lord, where also (in manner) He might have done no more for us, yet we fall continually into every sin and wretchedness, truly this our great unkindness hath chased us so far away from Him that marvel it is He will vouchsafe to look so far down to our ingratitude done unto His gentleness; Who also brought the people of Israel out of Egypt so marvellously with so many strange tokens and wonders, caused them to pass a-foot through the Red Sea dry shod; Who sent down from Heaven angels' food, and other wild fowl, curlews or quails; caused water to flow out of the hard stone for their relief; gave them victory of all their enemies; made the flood of the Jordan to leave its natural course and turn backward; divided and parted the land of behest¹ according to the number of the tribes and kindreds of Israel, so many as were ordained to have possession; and so oftentimes had mercy on them after they committed idolatry; Who also called us unto grace, where naturally we came of the Gentiles, and grafted us in the very olive-tree of faith, suffering¹ the natural boughs of it to be cut away. (The olive-tree signifieth the people of the Jews.) Last He spared not His own Son, but gave Him in redemption for us all. Notwithstanding we, unkind and most unkind without measure, take no heed, think not how much charity of God is shewed to us, but forget and in manner despise to follow and do after our merciful Lord for His great merits upon sinners. O tough and steely hearts! O heart more hard than flint or other stone! O great unkindness whereby we are made so far away from God that it is a marvel and in manner above all marvels

¹ promise.

to know Him look so far down into so great extremity of ingratitude! Therefore let these marvellous benefits of God be written for a continual remembrance of all Christian people to come after us. *Quia prospexit de excelso sancto suo.* Who looked down so far? Truly, our Lord God Who made all things of nought and is almighty, He may do what He list. From what place looked He down? Verily from His own high and holy palace. And whither? Into a low and strange place not hallowed. Heaven is of a great height, namely Heaven of all Heavens is so high that no adversary of God may attain or come thither; it is so holy that no spot of sin may be in it. And last, it is so much impropered¹ unto Almighty God that none of His enemies may there have any part with Him. And this earth which we wretched sinners do inhabit is not set up on high, but down in a low place full of sins and wickedness in every part of it; wherein also devils have domination, whom St. Paul calleth princes, potestates,² and rulers of the world and of sinful souls. It pleased Almighty God to look afar down from that high place into this earth, so low a place. From that so holy a place into this world, a place void of all holiness. He looked down also from the place wherein none of His adversaries shall be partakers with Him into this so strange a place whereas His adversaries have domination, where also so many great unkindnesses be exercised against Him. *Dominus de caelo in terram aspexit:* "Our Blessed Lord hath looked down afar" with His eye of mercy from the highest heaven into the earth." But to what purpose, what intent did He so? Looked He down to have any pleasure worldly, or else to hear the voices of good and rightwise people who lauded and praised Him? Nay verily, but only to hear the cryings, weepings and wailings of wretched and unkind people. Also to hear the wailings of those that knew not themselves when they were set in honour and prosperity, neither gave laud and praise unto our Lord God as they ought to have done, of very duty, but utterly put out of their mind and forgot His

¹ appropriated.² powers.

manifold great benefits; neither gave thanks for them, but rather fell down into all the filthiness and insatiable pleasures of the flesh, unto the great disworship and shame of Almighty God, so much as lay in them. What followed? Almighty God suffered those people to fall into the power of their enemies, and they anon took them prisoners, and so taken, bound fast and miserably stretched them in bonds, ropes and fetters of sins, in the which misery many of our forefathers perished and were damned eternally. But when the posterity of them saw their destructions and miseries, calling to mind the goodness of God and their own unkindness, they were much penitent for their offences and mislivings wherewith our most merciful Lord being moved of His goodness to exercise mercy, looked down from His holy place, Heaven of all Heavens, into the earth: *Ut audiret gemitus compeditorum, ut solveret filios interemptorum*: "Because He would hear the wailings of prisoners fettered and bound with the bonds of sin, and unbind or set at liberty the penitent children, whose forefathers were damned." We shall write this goodness of God and put it in a perpetual memory, to the intent all that hereafter be to come may shew each one to the other how mercifully our Lord hath dealt with us. In the which one thing He shall exhibit and shew so great mercy to us that it is not possible for any tongue to tell or to be expressed in words. Notwithstanding, God that is so rich and plenteous in mercy, shall think it but a little, wherefore He shall add and increase it more. This Blessed Lord shall not only deliver us from our wretchedness, but also of His merciful liberality, He shall set us in great honours. I cannot shew how a person being in thralldom might have more honour than to have his pleasure and be honoured in the same places where his capital¹ adversaries coveted most to be honoured. The devils studied to get honour in two places chiefly, in Heaven and in earth. In the earth the Hebrews had sufficient experience, from whom they took away the honour and worshipping of God Almighty, en-

¹ chief.

forcing them to commit idolatry. And now they assail us with thousands of guiles and frauds, challenging¹ the dominion and power of this world to themselves. In Heaven also, from whence they were expelled for pride, they took upon them and were about to usurp the honour of God for themselves: for Lucifer the chief captain and ringleader of them (to whom many others consented) said *Ascendam et ero similis altissimo*: "I shall ascend and be like to God." But now to our purpose. Our Blessed Lord and Master shall make us honourable in both places. First here in earth His Church Militant He shall give us power to preach and shew the virtue of His most glorious Name to all people universally, which shall be a very worshipful office. For by that St. Paul was called the chosen vessel of Almighty God to bear about that honourable Name, and boldly shew it, not only to the vulgar and common people, but also to kings and princes of the earth. Also nothing may be more grievous unto our enemies than it. For they continually blaspheme that most holy Name for this great honour. It followeth *Ut annuntient in Sion nomen Domini*. Our Lord shall set the ministers of His Church Militant in honour, that they may shew universally His holy Name to all people. In Heaven also, from whence Lucifer and all his company were deject and cast out, we shall laud the Name of God without end, and there shew to His honour His manifold deeds of mercy, giving thankings unto Him that we have escaped by His benefits the snares and dangers of all our capital enemies. We shall be exalted into that Heavenly Jerusalem, from whence they were thrown down, according to Scripture: *Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles*: "Almighty God deposed and put down from heaven proud Lucifer with all his company, and exalted meek people into that glorious place." Moreover, whatsoever we do here in this Church Militant, by prayer, laud, or any suffrage to God, the same is borne up by His angels into the Heavenly Jerusalem. For the which it followeth *Et laudem ejus in Jerusalem*: The angels shall bear up all

¹ arrogating.

our suffrages done to the laud of Almighty God in this Church Militant, "unto the celestial Jerusalem."

When our Lord hath delivered us by this manner from the bonds, fetters, and all bondage of our enemies, and made us able in virtues for to preach and shew His blessed Name unto all His people, then doubtless not only the common people, but also kings and princes shall come together in one to serve and laud Almighty God. Then, Blessed Lord, shall the people fear Thy Name, and all kings shall dread Thy glory and magnificence; that is for to say, when Our Lord, of His goodness, shall change and turn the soft and slippery dust (signifying wretched sinners) into tough earth by weeping and true penance for their sins, and after that make them hard as stones by burning charity, apt and able for to suffer great labours in shewing boldly Thy glorious Name throughout all the world, spreading and sowing over all the doctrine of Thy Gospels, giving also example of good and honest conversation, to the end that all the people in this world may be gathered into one flock, and the Church to be knit together in one faith, hope and charity. Wherefore this is added: *In conveniendo populos in unum et reges ut serviant Domino*. If it would please Our Lord God to shew this great goodness and mercy in our days, the memorial of His so doing ought of very right to be left in perpetual writing, never to be forgotten of all our posterity, that every generation to come might love and worship Him time without end.

But in so much as nothing in this life can be firm and stable without the help of God, therefore in this third part we are taught to make our petition unto our Blessed Lord that He vouchsafe of His goodness to sustain and hold up His Church Militant in the same order and course that we have spoken of, to the intent, after the journey performed in this life, it may the sooner ascend and come to the years which ever shall endure in Heaven. Truly or ever this order and course of the Church Militant be finished, according as we have shewed, shall be so many anguishes and tribulations in the said Church of God as never was seen or heard be-

fore unto this day. Which thing Christ our Saviour witnesseth, saying *Erunt dies illi tribulationis tales quales non fuerunt ab initio creaturæ quam condidit Deus usque nunc neque fient*. Holy interpreters of Scripture say there was never so great perturbation before the time, neither shall be hereafter, as it is to come in the time of Antichrist; in which time shall be so great trouble and sorrow among Christian people that, without our Lord deliver them and put-to His help the sooner, almost all should perish. For Himself said *Visi breviasset Dominus dies, non fuisset salva omnis caro*: "If Almighty God had not ordained the time of Antichrist to be short, no man almost then being alive should be saved." Thus our most loving Master Christ giveth monition unto His Church Militant here in earth of the tribulation to come, lest peradventure suddenly unbewares it fall in decay. And though it were sorrowful and grievous for the Church to hear these said words, nevertheless comfort might rise again by another saying of our Saviour: *Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem sæculi*: "Behold I am with you continually unto the world's end." And in another place He spoke these words following, which pertain more unto this matter, *Sed propter electos quos elegit, breviabit dies*: "God shall make short the time of Antichrist for the love of His elect people," lest they by the greatness of that tribulation should fall from the truth of Christ's faith. For these words of Almighty God it is no marvel if our Mother Holy Church once set and ordered in the course of virtue and in the ways of rightwise conversation, desire to know the end of her labours and travail, also the shortness of her days; wherefore it followeth *Respondit ei in via virtutis suæ; paucitatem dierum meorum nuntia mihi*. None doubt this was written of Sion; and, as we said, Sion signifyeth the Church; therefore the Church Militant established and edified in virtue to the uttermost, bearing in mind the words of Christ for the tribulations to come, maketh answer to Him in the course of her virtue desiring to know the shortness of her days. And, whereas prayers made unto God for a good intent

may not be unprofitable, therefore in this cause the Church asketh help of God. For Christ said *Vigilate itaque omni tempore orantes ut digni habeamini fugere ista omnia quæ futura sunt*; "Awake and be alway in prayer that ye may be worthy and able to flee these troubles to come." When a ship is once set in course to sail upon the sea, if in the mean season a sudden tempest of water or wind come against the ship, it should be a great impediment unto the going forward; so, without doubt, when the Church Militant shall be directed by Almighty God in the way of virtue, if in the meantime great tempest of temptations and many storms of trouble meet suddenly and come directly against it, great hurt and let¹ should follow in the passage. For this cause, the Church having knowledge before by our Saviour Christ of the tribulations to come, also that prayer is the only remedy for the same, maketh petition to God that her course be not withstood and letted, neither to be called again² in the midst of her journey by those tribulations, saying *Ne revoces me in dimidio dierum meorum*: "Blessed Lord" (saith our Mother Holy Church) "suffer me not by these tribulations to be called again in the midst of my journey, in the midst of my days." So many perils and jeopardies be upon the sea that whosoever shall sail over it must needs be desirous to come unto a haven, namely to that haven wherein is tranquillity and rest without peril. Like manner it is in the great sea of this world; for in it be so many sudden storms and perilous blasts of temptation to meet us on every side, that sith the port whereunto we be going is of so great surety, no marvel though the Church Militant desire and make haste to come unto it. Also it is grievous unto the said Church, if at any time the passage should be slackened or put aback, coming unto that quiet haven. Therefore is no pleasure in this world to cause it remain. Why? For it perceiveth well that nothing under the sun is stable. All is but vanity. One generation goeth, another cometh. They that were before our time be now passed and gone. And no man

¹ hindrance.² put back.

perceiveth the great damage which we suffer by the absence of many of them. Who is now so stubborn and evil-willed that his heart could not melt and be kindled with the fire of charity, if he might hear the Apostles preach, see the constant faith of martyrs, and have at hand the holy conversations of confessors? If now were so many saints yet alive in the Church as were before in time past, that everyone of us might be in their company when we would? It is not possible to shew what pleasure we should have in their holy preachings, constancy of faith and holy conversations; also what goodness we should purchase unto souls by the reason of the same. Then, of a truth, we should be desirous to come unto that port where no succession of generation is, but all eternity without change, as in Heaven where Almighty God is resident. For this our Mother Holy Church prayeth that she be not letted nor called away by worldly temptations from the beginning of her journey, saying *Quoniam a generatione in generationem anni tui*. Here on the earth is division of generations from one unto another, when one is going, another cometh. But, good Lord, there is none such where Thou art, "for Thy years, Thy time shall ever endure." Thine eternal continuance shall be much more excellent and much far above the perdurance of Heavens, or of the earth. Of the earth it is said thus: *Generatio præterit, generatio advenit: terra autem in æternum stat*: "Generation goeth, generation cometh, the earth standeth ever." But Almighty God was before the earth. We see also the earth taketh his goodness and perfection of another, that is, the sun: for in the absence of the sun the earth is dead, and in manner naked without any comfort, and at the coming again of the same it is clad and covered with all manner of fairness. Then thus, that thing which taketh his perfection of another must needs without doubt receive his essential being of another. The earth doth in like manner as we have shewed, therefore he hath his being of another; and that thing of whom he had his being must needs go before and continue longer than it. The Maker and Beginner of the earth was Almighty God: as it fol-

loweth, *Initio tu, Domine, terram fundasti*: "Lord Thou made the earth in his beginning." Therefore God was before the earth, and not only before the earth, but also before the heavens. For we see and behold the moon sometime full of light and sometime without, which light she receiveth of the sun, of whom also all other stars take their light. The sun goeth sometime from us, and anon it cometh again, now it riseth and anon it goeth down; notwithstanding, he keepeth his course without fail. Of whom receiveth the sun his course? Verily only of Almighty God, for by the commandment of Him it is borne about in the orbs above, like as other celestial bodies be. For a conclusion it followeth, all these have their order and being of Almighty God. *Et opera manuum tuarum sunt celi*: "Good Lord, Thou only made the heavens, and of Thee they have the natural course in their movings." By this we perceive for a truth that heaven and earth had their beginning and institution of God; they endure and continue only by His marvellous power; also they shall have an end of this condition they be in now, when it please God. For it is written *Cælum et terra transibunt*: "Heaven and earth shall have an end." O marvellous blindness of mortal creatures which will not suffer us to look up and remember the eternity of years to come, whereof shall be no end, sith the time of our life is here so short and soon passed away, and all the world likewise shall soon be at an end! Why do we not speed us hastily to come unto that rest of eternity which may be obtained by our little and short labours here, rather than follow the voluptuous pleasures of this world, whereby we shall come into everlasting defatigations and weariness in Hell? For where Almighty God is resident all things be good, Whose goodness is inenarrable and everlasting. Everything in this world is caduke, transitory and momentary; ¹ all volupty in this life endureth but a short season; no generation shall long be permanent. Heaven and earth shall have an end; wherefore it followeth *Ipsi peribunt, tu autem permanes*: "Heaven and earth shall perish, but

¹ momentaneous.

Thou, good Lord, art everlasting." How shall they perish and be at an end? Truly none otherwise but they shall be changed into another condition than they be now in; Heaven shall be new, and the earth also; as much as to say, both shall be changed and made new like as our bodies after the general resurrection shall be in another condition. Not that Heaven and earth shall have a new substance, neither our bodies, but a new condition of substance. Their conditions shall in manner be old and worn, and for that they shall change and do away their old condition, like as we might say they shall do off their old garments and do upon them new. The prophet saith *Omnes sicut vestimentum veterascent*: "All shall wax old like as doth a garment." Notwithstanding, they shall be changed new, and set in a better condition than they were in before. St. Peter saith *Novos enim celos novam terram expectamus*: "We desire a new heaven and a new earth"; none otherwise meant, but in a new condition of substance, like as in changing our clothes, we do off the old and put on new. So the Heavens, after their old conditions taken away, shall be renewed into a far better manner; they shall be covered with a more noble covering by the commandment of God. It followeth *Et sicut opertorium mutabis eos et mutabuntur*. It is according with reason that everything created, in order, at the last must needs attain unto that thing which is most high in perfection, of whom and by whom all other doth depend and have their original. Itself dependeth of nothing but may have all that it hath of itself sufficing itself abundantly, needing nothing of any other; and all other hath need to it, as well man as other creatures upon the earth. The earth, also Heaven and all things contained in the circuit of the Heavens have need to it. The generations of men should not long live if they were not nourished with the food and fruit that groweth upon the earth, also they could not be brought forth but of the earth. Itself earth should alway be barren and without fruit if it received no moisture and heat from heaven. The inferior orbs in the heavens be led about in their course by the first

orb. And last, the first orb hath all his virtue and strength of Almighty God, Increaser of all things. Forasmuch as Almighty God hath nothing above Him whereof He might take anything for His perfection, therefore He is Most High, Most Perfect, All-Good, and Itself Goodness,¹ having everlasting perduration, without beginning, without end, before everything, and cause of all things; of Whom everything receiveth his perfection and is made of nought; Which gave unto all creatures apt and convenient strength, and may take it away when His pleasure is so to do. Notwithstanding, He is always One, immutable, and without transmutation in all His acts; wherefore it is spoken unto Him *Tu autem idem ipse es et anni tui non deficient*: All earthly things be mutable and shall have an end, "but Thou, good Lord, art always One without change, and Thy years shall never fail"; Thou art everlasting. Then sith our Blessed Lord is Author and Maker of all things, also he hath distinct² and ordered them in so marvellous good order, made fair the earth with herbs, trees, and with beasts, the water with fishes, the air with birds, and the heavens with stars. In all these is great pleasure and fairness for our bodily eyes to behold. Our best and most benign Lord God made all these common both to rightwise and unrightwise people, for His friends and for His foes. *Qui solem suum facit oriri super bonos et malos*: "Which maketh His sun to spring and shine both upon good people and evil." Forasmuch as our Blessed Lord hath given unto all these caduke and transitory things so great fairness as is daily perceived and seen, how great beauty and brightness shall we think hath He given unto these eternal places wherein His self is inhabitant and abiding? Sith He hath endowed the house of men (that is for to say, this world) with so many commodities, how much more hath He ornate His own place and royal habitation? And last, since He hath given unto this naughty³ world so many great pleasures, common both unto His friends and His enemies, needs must be far more goodli-

¹ Goodness itself.

² distinguished.

³ of nothingness.

ness and pleasures where light is, inaccessible, which no tongue can express, neither mind think, prepared and made ready in His place celestial to His friends that serve Him diligently and lovingly in this life. The children of our Mother Holy Church whom the ministers and servants of Almighty God hath regenerate by the words of the holy Gospel, shall without fear or dread be inhabitant and abiding in this holy place: wherefore the Church saith unto God *Filii servorum tuorum habitabunt*: "The children of Thy servants shall be permanent in Thy sanctuary." Lo in these words the Church useth meekness and lowliness, calling the inheritors of Heaven not her children but the children of the servants of God. For St. Paul, which named himself God's servant, called those people which he gat by preaching of Christ's law, his own dear children, saying *Ut filios carissimos moneo*: "I warn you, my dear children." And why he so named them, the cause followeth: *Per evangelium ego vos genui*: "I have gotten you by preaching the holy Gospel of Christ." The servants of God that preach and teach His holy doctrine be named Fathers, the Church a Mother, and all true Christian people be called children; which, after this life, shall abide everlastingly in the sanctuary of God among those inestimable pleasures. *Et semen eorum in sæculum dirigetur*: "And the seed of them," (that is to say their good works), "shall be directed unto Heaven eternally." No man in this life is so steadfast in well doing, but sometime may err. The holy man Job said *Verebar omnia opera mea*: "I feared all my works." I knew not what state I stood in. St. Paul also said *Qui stat, videat ne cadat*: "He that thinketh himself in the state of grace, let him beware lest he fall from it." But whosoever shall be assumed into the Heavenly Jerusalem shall be sure never more to sin; he shall so be confirmed by grace that never after he shall offend, but whatsoever he doeth then shall be good and rightwise. The seed of good Christian people (that is to say, their good works) shall be lift up into heaven eternally.

Now let us make an end of our sermon, beseeching

our most merciful Lord God that He vouchsafe to look upon the misery of His Church Militant with the eye of His mercy, sometime set in it worthy and able ministers that may turn all the world unto the faith of Christ, making the seed of the Church innumerable; and in conclusion the Church, once set stably in the course of virtue, be not letted nor cast aback in her journey, but shortly may ascend to the eternal pleasures of Almighty God in Heaven, where the true children of our Lord shall be permanent world without end. Amen.

THE SIXTH PENITENTIAL PSALM.

DE PROFUNDIS CLAMAVI AD TE DOMINE:

DOMINE EXAUDI VOCEM MEAM.

(PSALM cxxix.)

EVERY sinner breaking the commandment of God goeth away from Him, and draweth backward into many great and perilous deep dangers, falling down more and more toward the horrible pit of Hell: which thing Holy Scripture hath shewed figuratively in the story of the prophet Jonas, describing certain degrees and orders of his descensions, when he did break the commandment of God. And we shall here mark and note seven points in the same order as they be there shewed. First, when Jonas breaking God's commandment turned himself away and fled from the face of God. Second, when he went to a town named Joppa nigh to the sea, where he hired a ship convenient to pass over on his journey. Third, when he entered into the ship, (and¹ as Scripture saith, 'came down into it') having monition by the sudden rising of a great tempestuous storm, notwithstanding, would not return to land. Fourth, when he went down into the hollow and lowest places of the ship, and there slept soundly. Fifth, when he was cast out from thence into the surging sea. Sixth, when he was devoured and swal-

¹ or.

lowed down into the lowest part of a great whale's belly. Seventh and last, if in all these tribulations he had not shortly remembered Almighty God and been succoured by His help, could not have escaped; but, anon as he had been digested in that great fish's belly, should have been voided out from him in manner of dung, and so slipped down into the bottom of the great sea. These seven degrees of the fall of Jonas from God by breaking His commandment, signify unto us the divers fallings down of the sinner, whereby he goeth lower and lower from one degree to another into divers perils of deepnesses.

It forceth¹ not for our purpose at this season though Jonas in Holy Scripture signify Christ. For one and the same thing by a divers consideration may be taken figuratively for two contraries. Sometime in Holy Scripture the lion signifieth Christ; and sometime by the lion is signified the devil, as in the epistle of St. Peter *Tanquam leo rugiens circuit*. It signifieth Christ, as in the Apocalypse: *Vicit leo de tribu Juda*. What things be more contrary than God and the devil? Forasmuch therefore as one thing may betoken Christ and the devil, why may not Jonas sometime signify Christ and sometime the sinner? But let us proceed (with) that we have begun.

We shall mark and consider in what manner the degrees of Jonas' falling down from God may be correspondent and signify the degrees of the sinner's descensions from God by sin. The first degree going into sin is consent of the mind, with a deliberation had before, to anything forbidden by the law of God. For a more open declaration, this shall be an example. Peradventure here is a young man yet chaste of his body; the remembrance of a fair woman cometh to his mind; he doth not withstand it, but busily thinketh on her beauty, and setteth his mind for to have his fleshly lust of that same woman, and at the last consenteth for to have ado with her, if that he might have opportunity and leisure. This consent of the mind is deadly sin, albeit that he never

¹ matters.

have his purpose in deed. Jesu Christ our Saviour saith in the Gospel *Qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam jam mœchatus est eam in corde suo*: "He that beholdeth a woman, consenting in his mind for to have his lust of her, if that he might, the sin is committed in his heart"; and by that same consent only he sinneth deadly. If that he then died without any penance he should be damned for ever. But the cogitations which come suddenly unto the mind, be they never so unclean, if that we consent not but repugn against them as much as we may, be no deadly sins, nor no venial oftentimes; and we also shall have great profit by striving against them, not consenting at any time. He that setteth his mind more upon a worldly creature or pleasure than upon God, turneth himself away from his Maker, followeth and doth after that worldly thing contrary to His law; which is called the unlawful consent of the mind. He fleeth from God, like as Jonas, having in commandment to go unto the great city of Ninive, fled, disobeyed, and would not do as he was commanded. It is written of him thus. Almighty God said to Jonas: "Rise and go to the great city of Ninive; preach and tell them that their malice and sinful living is come to My knowledge." Then Jonas rose, disobeyed that commandment, and fled from the face of our Lord. Thus ye perceive how manifestly the first fall into sin, which is consent, agreeth unto the first fall of Jonas.

The second degree of the sinner's fall is the study and busy searching for time and opportunity when he may fulfil his purpose in deed. For at such season as the sinner busieth himself how and by what mean he may accomplish that sin whereunto he hath consented before, then he falleth down one degree deeper, and his sin is more grievous than it was only by consenting. In his so doing he heapeth sin upon sin, and maketh the first spot of it more black, more foul in the sight of God than it was. Truly it is a general rule when a sin once purposed by consent in our mind is deadly, whatsoever we do for the accomplishment of the same is also deadly sin. An example: perchance thou hast decreed with thyself

(if thou might conveniently) to use thy body after the sensual lust and pleasure with a certain woman, also goest about and procurest by many means to fulfil the same in deed, either by wantonness of words, by wanton looks, gallant apparel of thy body, by oft giving gifts, or any other way. Whatever thou do in full purpose of the same, be it never so little, if it were but the lifting up of a straw, is deadly sin. This second degree of the sinner's fall is figured by the second act of Jonas, when he went to Joppa, a town nigh the sea, there hired a ship to the intent he might Judasly flee from the face of our Lord God. Of his so doing Scripture speaketh by these words: *Et descendit Joppen et invenit navem euntem in Tharsis et dedit naulum ejus*: "Jonas went down to Joppa, there found a ship going toward the country of Tharsis and hired the same."

The third degree of the sinner's fall is fulfilling of his purpose that he hath been about so long to accomplish. Consent is evil; the busy mean to fulfil his purpose is worse; and the accomplishment of the sin in deed is worst of all, for three causes. First, for the long continuance, second for the more lust and pleasure had in the offence, and third for the great hurt that cometh by it, both of soul and body. A man doing a trespass against Almighty God and lying long in it offendeth more grievously than if, anon as he is fallen down by sin, he will rise again. That person is less blameworthy which shortly after consenting will refrain himself than long so¹ to continue, and in conclusion fulfil his purpose. The immoderate lust and pleasure of the body is made more grievous by fulfilling of it in deed, than it should have been only by thought or consent. For although if the mind be set on bodily pleasure, whereby the soul is sore vexed, and, after, both body and soul consent to the same, the sin is great; but in conclusion if the accomplishment of the same be exercised in deed, it is made much more grievous. For by thought and consent only the soul is made foul, and by the deed both body and soul is corrupt; and, many times, two bodies, as by the

¹ than if he long continue so.

sin of fornication. This third degree is figured by the third act of Jonas: for as the sinner first findeth means and then doth the deed, so Jonas first found the way and mean to hire the ship and after entered into it. *Et descendit in eam*: "He came down into the ship." And like as many times when a person hath grievously offended anon he is smitten with the abomination of his sin; albeit, he will not refrain by that godly monition; so, anon as Jonas was entered in the ship, a great tempest arose on the sea; notwithstanding, he would not return to land.

The fourth degree in the fall of the sinner is the custom of the same. The more that a sinner accustometh himself in sin, the more grievous and deeper is his descension toward the pit of Hell, although he perceive it not. For by little and little he sinketh into the filthy pleasure of it, even as a horse, the softer mire or clay he waltereth himself in, the more easily he lieth and imprinteth deeper his similitude in it; but when he is about to rise again, the softness of the clay will not suffer to take hold whereby he might be assisted. The custom of nature is much like; for naturally we must use meat and drink in hunger and thirst, and other in like wise as we have been customably used unto. This fourth degree is more grievous in the sight of God than is one deed or once doing of a sin. Peradventure one offence, trespass, or fall may be excused because that a man of himself is so frail. For it is said: *Humanum est cadere*: "The property of man is to fall." *Sed pergere in lapsu et perseverare diabolicum est*: "But to lie long and continue in sin is appropriated¹ to the devil." When the devil hath enticed any person to this point of continuance, he hath then brought him in a sad and sound sleep, that scant can awake for any calling or noise. This degree of the sinner's fall is represented by the fourth act of Jonas, which perceived a great tempest coming; albeit, he would not return to land, but went down into the lowest parts of the ship and there slept sore. Of his so doing Scripture sheweth, saying *Descendit in interiora*

¹ appropriate.

navis et dormiebat sopore gravi: "Jonas descended into the low parts of the ship and there slept soundly." So after the sinner be come into the custom of sin, he goeth down and in manner sleepeth in it.

The fifth (degree) in the fall of the sinner is when he rejoiceth and maketh boast of the sin that he committed, where, of very right, he should be ashamed and fear the pains of the law ordained for open sinners. Such persons be both without fear and shame. They shew openly and many times in common taverns to others of like disposition, their ignominious and shameful offences, making great cracks how wickedly they have done with that woman and with that; and peradventure will slander her which they never touched. Thus they make open vaunt of themselves to the intent other should laud and praise their wickedness. Of whom may be spoken the saying of the prophet Osee: *Profunde peccaverunt.* "They sinned deeply"; and so deeply that our Saviour compareth that slanderous shewing of their wickedness unto the fall of him which slippeth down to the bottom of the sea. *Utilius est illi si lapis molaris imponatur circa collum ejus et proiciatur in mare:* "It should be better and more profitable for the sinner if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and so cast into the sea," than openly shew his sin by boasting or cracking. The fifth act of Jonas is correspondent to this degree, when he was cast into the sea and drowned in the waters. So these great abominable sinners that make boast of their ungraciousness be drowned utterly in sin, overwhelmed with the manifold floods of it.

The sixth degree is when the sinner will defend his error and impugn against virtue. They have so long used and accustomed themselves in vicious living, so long made their vaunt of their so doing, that it seemeth to them as no sin; and by all means that may be found, procure and be about to cause all other to think the same. O great and deadly profundity of sin! When a man is fallen down to this degree he despiseth and utterly forsaketh all wholesome monitions whereby he might be brought again unto the right way of good life. Sapience

saith *Impius quum in profundum malorum venerit, contemnit*: "When the sinner is fallen into the deepness of sin, then he despiseth" all wholesome remedies and correction for the amendment of his sinful living; he would have every person to be of his manner; also will not suffer the life of wicked folks to be reproved and spoken against, neither the grievous wounds of his soul to be touched in any condition. The sinner which is of this manner the devil hath all-whole in his possession and power. St. John sheweth that our adversary the devil goeth about searching whom he may devour; but now I fear he needeth not so to do, for his purpose in manner is already fulfilled, he hath devoured and swallowed many into the lowest part of his belly. This sixth degree is well shewed by the sixth act of Jonas, when the great mighty whale devoured and swallowed him down into the vile and lowest part of his carcass. In like manner these obstinate and abominable sinners be utterly devoured and swallowed down of our great enemy the devil.

The seventh degree is to despair of the great mercy of God: which is most deep, most perilous of all others, and next to the horrible pit of Hell. If any creature be fallen down so deep that he despair, it shall be very hard for him to rise again. St. Chrysostom saith *Desperatio non sinit peccatorem post lapsum exurgere*: "Despair will not suffer a man when he is fallen down, to rise again." It is like a deep pit whose mouth is stopped up with a great stone so that nothing may get out, but if¹ the stone be removed. The covering of this deep pit, desperation, may not be taken away without strong and steadfast hope in the great mercy of Almighty God; of the which superabundant mercy we have so much spoken in the other Psalms before that, if great plenty of Scripture were not, which, by and by,² in every place praiseth and exalteth this great mercy, I should be afeard lest no more could be spoken of it. Then sith this mercy is never void but alway spoken of in Scripture in every corner, it must needs (as me seemeth) be a great comfort

¹ unless.

² *passim*.

to all true penitents. It is also approved by so many parables and similitudes, promised with so many affirmations, and, last, hath been so oft exercised upon so many sinners, that of a truth the sinner is over-much obstinate and hard-hearted which cannot meek himself lowly, having full confidence and steadfast hope in the endless mercy of God. He that cannot find in his heart to submit himself by this manner is digested and incorporate into the substance of the devil, even as meat when it is digested is turned into the substance of flesh and blood. For amongst all sins desperation is the thing that most maketh us devilish, and our condition like to damned spirits; for they shall ever be in despair, never trust to have forgiveness. But now to our purpose. If Jonas being in the whale's belly, destitute and wide¹ from all help of any creature, had not been succoured by the great mercy of our Lord, I beseech you, who could have saved him from turning apart into the whale's nature by digestion, and the residue to have been voided out through his guts like dung into the deep sea? Whereby we may well perceive that a sinner falling down from one degree of sin into another, without he shortly return to the state of grace, amending his life, call to Almighty God his Maker for help, and have a full trust in that merciful Lord, shall at the last by despair be incorporate to the substance of the devil, so shall be conveyed through his belly and fall down into the deep pit of Hell. But Jonas in all his jeopardies cried to our merciful Lord God, asking mercy; which anon he obtained, for by the commandment of God he was delivered from all perils and set again upon the earth. If a sinner will do in like manner, Almighty God without doubt shall shew His mercy and clean deliver him from all peril of damnation. It is therefore very necessary for every sinner diligently to take heed, calling to remembrance the perilous and privy² jeopardies he lieth in, wisely with a circumspect mind to look upon the dangers that may fall by the same, and, that done, lift up the eyes of his soul to our most merciful Lord God, saying *De profundis clamavi ad te*

¹ afar.² peculiar.

Domine: Domine exaudi vocem meam: "Blessed Lord, I a sinful creature call to Thee for help. I beseech Thee hear my voice." It is also profitable for good and rightwise people often to rehearse this verse whereby they may avoid the great perils of this wretched world. No creature living is so steadfast and sure but may fall into these deep dangers of sin: wherefore St. Paul admonishes us all, saying *Qui stat, videat ne cadat*: "He that standeth, (or else, he that is in the right way of good living), let him take heed lest he fall (or go out of it)." For this cause every rightwise person say *De profundis clamavi ad te Domine: Domine, exaudi vocem meam*: "Good Lord, I being in trouble and fear (of mine enemies the world, the flesh and the devil) cry to Thee for help. Hear my voice," deliver me from their dangers. Third, let us oft repeat this said verse for them that be in the pains of Purgatory, for whom Christ's Church hath ordained specially this Psalm to be said. The souls, being in these great pains, abide ever looking for the great mercy of God, also one drop of it to assuage their pains by the help of our prayers. Therefore, as heartily as we can, let us all say this for their comfort *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine: Domine, exaudi vocem meam*.

Forasmuch as this Psalm of our holy fathers is set in the number of Penitential Psalms, therefore in our beginning it is convenient we shew some reason why it ought so to be named, and what thing is in it belonging to penance. There be three parts of penance, as it is shewed by divines, (whereof we have oft spoken by divers figures), contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Notwithstanding, in many places of Scripture they be shewed figuratively by the number of three, as it appeareth in Exodus. The people of Israel walked in the wilderness many times, but among all other specially is there named the space of three days, which the great doctor Origen expounding sheweth the mystery of the three parts of penance to be signified by those three days. Also in the story of Jonas (whereof before we have somewhat touched) is shewed that Jonas, being in the whale's

belly the space of three days, cried to Almighty God for his deliverance, which the third day was heard, delivered from the devouring of that same great and horrible beast or fish that swallowed him into his belly, and so set again upon the earth. These three days likewise, as we said before, signify the three parts of penance, whereby sinners be delivered from the captivity of the devil, from his tyranny, and restored again to their first liberty. Our prophet David in the beginning of this Psalm useth a like mystery, first expressing his petition unto God by these words: *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine: Domine, exaudi vocem meam. Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ.* In the which words be expressed the three parts of penance. First he prayeth for contrition saying *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.* For confession, he added *Domine, exaudi vocem meam.* And third, for satisfaction *Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ.* First, contrition is a great inward sorrow, coming from the very deepness of the heart with meekness, by a profound consideration and remembrance of our sins. Truly, the deepness of sin is very great, as it was shewed before. And, for that cause, we must make deep search in our conscience remembering the greatness of every sin with great humility coming from the heart root. *Profundum est cor hominis:* "The heart of man is deep." Whosoever crieth to Almighty God heartily, (that is to say, from the deepness of his heart) must needs be heard. God may not expulse or forsake the heart that is so penitent and meek. For our prophet saith in another place *Cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non despiciet:* "Blessed Lord, Thou shalt not despise a contrite heart." And how may the heart be more contrite and meek as¹ when of very contrition, meekness and profound consideration of our sins, we ask mercy and forgiveness of Almighty God? A little sorrow is not sufficient, nor little penance, but we must have great sorrow and great penance which maketh a great noise before our most merciful Lord. And the person that crieth to God in

¹ than.

this wise, with great sorrow and penance, hath very contrition. He may well say *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine*: "Lord, I have cried to Thee from my very heart root." But this cry must be soft, without noise of words; it must be in the secret places of the heart, no voice, no sound, in any wise shewed outwardly. Contrition is none other but an inward sorrow of the mind set in the privy place of the heart; which needs must go before confession made by mouth, for truly confession, without contrition had before, profiteth very little or nothing. Albeit contrition is secret within the privy place of the heart, notwithstanding, confession must be made by open words, manifest shewing of the mind, expressing truly and openly every sin with the circumstances to a priest; all colouring, feigning and hiding of our trespass set apart. Which cannot be done in any condition but by speaking of words. Therefore every penitent in this second place is taught to ask of Almighty God that He vouchsafe mercifully to hear and accept his confession, saying *Domine, exaudi vocem meam*: "Lord, hear the voice of my confession." We said satisfaction is the third part of penance: which¹ is divided into other three parts, almsdeed, fasting and prayer. Amongst these prayer is the chief, and in manner all whole satisfaction. This may be shewed for three reasons. First, because it includeth the other two, almsdeed and fasting. Second, it is a sacrifice of a more noble thing than any other. And third, it is more common, more light, more easy for any person to do. Prayer in itself is almsdeed, namely when we pray for sinners, being in great necessity and misery. For by our so doing we shew and exercise our spiritual alms unto their souls, which is far better than any bodily alms-doing. Prayer also, if it come from the heart and mind, as it should, maketh the body weary, feeble, and subject to the soul: which thing is specially done by fasting. Now ye may perceive how prayer includeth the other two parts of satisfaction, almsdeed and fasting. Second, we said prayer is a sacrifice made of a more excellent, noble,

¹ *i.e.* satisfaction.

and acceptable thing before God. For when we distribute our goods giving them in alms to the poor people, a sacrifice is made of our worldly substance to Almighty God. By fasting we do sacrifice with the substance of our bodies; but when we make our prayers, lifting up our minds to Almighty God, a sacrifice is made of our soul; which is most acceptable in his sight. Therefore as much as the soul is better, more noble and acceptable than is the body or any worldly riches, so much more noble sacrifice prayer must needs be than is almsdeed or fasting. Third, we said prayer is more common and easy for any person to do. Every body is not of substance in riches to give alms unto the poor, neither any person is so whole and strong of himself to suffer many long fastings, but who is so feeble and weak in body that may not at some time pray? Truly, none. Therefore prayer is more common, more light and easy than is fasting or almsdeed. And forasmuch as it is chief amongst the other parts of satisfaction, our prophet therefore remembereth and teacheth the penitent specially in this third place to ask of God faithfully, with true hope, that of His goodness He give heed unto his prayer. *Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ:* "Good Lord, I beseech Thee give heed to the voice of my prayer with the ears of Thy pity and mercy." This is the sum of our whole petition, that our Blessed Lord of His goodness vouchsafe to accept our penance, done with a good will also with true contrition, confession, and satisfaction: whereby we may be defended and holden up from the horrible pit of eternal damnation.

If Almighty God be so cruel and unmerciful that, for our offence done against His goodness, he will not forgive and exercise His mercy when we call for it, peradventure we should take occasion to leave our patience for His sake, and so slip down into the eternal pains of Hell: like as the Wise Man saith *Væ his qui perdiderunt sustinentiam:* "Everlasting sorrow be to them that have lost their patience," which is only sustained by true faith and hope in His merciful forgiveness. Therefore our prophet teaches us here to put our steadfast hope

and confidence in God, and with the same comfort our souls, promising also that He shall exercise His mercy upon all very contrite and true penitents. Which promise He fortifieth by three manner means, first by the occasions that should cause us not to have forgiveness. Second by the promise made to every true penitent, and third by His superabundant mercy, which is ever ready to all that will ask it, forsaking their sinful life. Three things there be which of a likelihood should cause Almighty God not to forgive sinners. First the greatness of their sins. Second His rightwiseness. Third the institution and ordinance of His law. But now we shall shew that these three cannot withstand the forgiveness of Almighty God, but needs He must be merciful and forgive sinners, be they never so grievous, namely them which be penitent and sorrowful for their misliving. Our wickedness shall not withstand if we will be penitent and with a constant mind amend our life. Else all we were in a perilous condition. For when any person offendeth against Almighty God, if He were not merciful and willing to forgive his trespass, alas, all we be in great jeopardy of damnation! What shall we do but fall into the deep dungeon of despair? If it were shewed once for a truth that God would not forgive sinners, how might we keep ourselves from desperation? Despair is none other but wanting of very hope and trust in the forgiveness of Almighty God. If it so were that God would not exercise His mercy, by what means might we order ourself not to fall into despair? But doubtless it is not so; He is merciful and alway ready to forgive. For now be innumerable saints in heaven; notwithstanding, sometime they grievously trespassed, breaking the commandments of God. And what creature liveth that never offendeth? The Wise Man asketh this question: *Quis potest dicere, mundum est cor meum, purus sum a peccato*: "What person living may say My heart is clean, I am without sin?" St. Paul saith *Omnes peccaverunt et eguerunt gratia et misericordia omnipotentis Dei*: "All were sinners (few except) and needed the grace and mercy of Almighty God," which was granted, and ever

shall be to all that will ask it. This may well be affirmed, desiring none other example but that we spoke of before. Ye heard how marvellously Jonas was delivered by the mercy of God from the deep dangers that he was in; ye heard also of the many great jeopardies of his life that he was in, almost destitute from hope. He thought never (in manner) to have been succoured, and set again at liberty; notwithstanding, he cried to our merciful Lord, and obtained forgiveness. Now thou sinner, whatsoever thou art, (if any such be in this presence) that for the greatness of thy sin is fallen into despair, hear now the great offence of Jonas against our Lord God, breaking His commandment; and yet, notwithstanding, by his prayer obtained forgiveness. It was not denied but liberally granted. All ye know right well the more gently and meekly Almighty God dealeth with any person, the higher in degree that He set him, if he break His commandments the more grievous is his offence. Now, so it is, Jonas was called of God to a high office, had authority to speak for a whole commonwealth. It may be called the state or degree of Apostle, which in honour is above all the degrees of this world. He had also the spirit of prophecy, a marvellous gift. Very few or none be endued with it. The commandment he had was not by a general precept as the office of bishops and others which have cure of souls is generally given to them; but much more specially it was attribute to him by peculiar revelation and the word of Almighty God. As it is written in Holy Scripture: *Factum est verbum Domini ad Jonam*: "Our Lord said to Jonas." Truly, a great difference is between the commandment given by a king to any person by name, and the commandment given to a whole multitude indifferently. Furthermore the matter, the business, which was commanded him to do was of no small weight, and also he might have done it at his ease. Every man will think the matter great whereby the health and relief of a hundred and twenty thousand souls dependeth. So many was in the city of Ninive whereunto he was sent. He needed not to make a great oration to persuade the people. These few words had

been sufficient for his discharge: *Adhuc quadraginta dies et Ninive subvertetur*: "Within forty days the city of Ninive shall be destroyed." Ye see well the shewing of this matter was not so diffuse but he might have done it on the best wise. Jonas had a vain and foolish estimation, regarding himself too much. He thought "Almighty God is so good and merciful of Himself, that as soon as the people will forsake their error and acknowledge themselves guilty, He will doubtless shew His mercy on them, and so shall I ever after be taken as a liar and never after be given credence to my words." For this cause he fled, would not obey the commandment of God, more regarding himself than the salvation of so many thousand souls. All these things considered, we may well perceive his great contempt against God and breaking of His law. Notwithstanding, our best and merciful Lord, when Jonas in all his great perils remembered his unkindness done against his Maker and called to Him for mercy, anon He granted him forgiveness. If God had kept in mind his unkindness, truly he had not so have been delivered; but He, of His gentleness, took more heed to his penance than to his offences done before. Which gentleness He sheweth to every sinner that will forsake his wretched life and ask forgiveness. If Almighty God were not thus beneficial and merciful, neither Jonas nor any other creature might escape the danger of falling into despair. Therefore our prophet saith *Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine: Domine, quis sustinebit?* "Lord, if Thou bear in mind our sins and will not forgive us, who may keep him from despair?" By these¹ we may know that our sins cannot withstand the great mercy of God, if we be penitent. Now we shall shew that the righteousness of God can be none obstacle against His mercy.

It is required both of right and equity a recompense to be made for trespass or unkindness shewed to any person, or ever the offence be utterly forgiven. And for that cause a certain solemn feast was institute in the old law by Moses, according to God's commandment, every

¹ understand 'words'.

year to be celebrated and kept, which they named the Feast of Making Clean and the Day of Mercy. In that solemn feast customably was offered up a certain general sacrifice for the sins of all the people. On that day, when that the bishop of their law had hallowed certain quick¹ beasts in an outhouse of the Temple, anon himself only, arrayed with solemn apparel should enter in the Temple, and go forth to a place in the said Temple called *Sancta sanctorum*, taking with him part of the beast's blood, which seven times he should sprinkle before the feet of God, which they called *Propitiatorium*, a place of mercy: wherewith Almighty God should be made more meek, and the sooner exercise His mercy upon the people. So for this cause they named that solemn feast the Day of Mercy. All this sacrifice done by the bishop in the old law was only but a figure, and (as St. Paul wrote unto the Hebrews) a signification or token of the known truth to come. Therefore, Christian people, since our time now is the plenteous time of grace, we may not be in no worse condition than the Jews were. In their time Almighty God was appeased by the means of their sacrifice. Now much more in our days, whereas grace is superabundant, a sacrifice shall be made the which is of much more strength, more virtue, to purge and utterly do away our sins. Also it shall sooner move Almighty God to exercise His mercy upon us. Let us remember Who is our Bishop, what is our Sacrifice, what manner Blood it is, what is the inward part of the Temple, and to what intent all these were ordained. The holy doctor St. Paul sheweth them at large in a marvellous epistle written to the Hebrews. *Christus, assistens pontifex futurorum bonorum, per amplius et perfectius tabernaculum non manu factum, id est non hujus creationis, neque per sanguinem hircorum aut vitulorum sed per proprium sanguinem, introivit semel in sancta æterna redemptione inventa.* Christ Jesus is our Bishop, His Most Precious Body is our Sacrifice, which He offered upon a Cross for the redemption of all the world. The Blood shed for our redemption was not the blood of goats or calves as

¹ live.

in the old law, it was the very Blood, most innocent, of our Saviour Jesu Christ. The temple wherein our Bishop did sacrifice was not made by man's hands but only by the power of God. He shed His precious Blood for our redemption in the face of all the world, which is the temple made only by the hand of God. This temple hath two divers parts, one is the earth whereon we be inhabitors, the other is not yet known to us mortal creatures. First, He did sacrifice on the earth when He suffered His Passion; after, in a new clothing or garment, the vesture of immortality, and with His own precious Blood, entered into *Sancta Sanctorum*, that is to say into Heaven, where He showed His said most precious Blood before the throne of His Father, which He shed for all sinners seven times. By this holy sacrifice Almighty God must needs have pity and execute His mercy to all true penitents, and this sacrifice shall ever continue, not only year by year as the manner was of the Jews, but also It is daily offered for our comfort, and every hour and moment for our most strong succour: wherefore St. Paul saith *Æterna redemptione inventa*: "By it we be redeemed for ever." Every contrite and true penitent person, not willing to fall again but with a full purpose continue in virtuous living, is partaker of this Holy Sacrifice. As St. John sheweth in his First Epistle, *Filioli mei, hæc scribo vobis ut non peccetis. Sed et si quis peccaverit, advocatum habeamus apud Patrem, Jesum Christem justum: et ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris: non pro nostris autem tantum, sed et totius mundi*: "My dear children in God, I write to you giving monition that ye abstain from sin; and if at any season by your own negligence ye trespass against God, call unto Jesu Christ, our Advocate in Heaven unto the Father; Which offered Himself in sacrifice for our sins, not only for ours but also for the sins of all the world." All we therefore being penitent and sorrowful for offences past, with a full purpose never again to trespass, trusting by the grace of our Lord so to continue, may trust verily that by this Sacrifice, the Body of Jesus Christ daily offered for our redemption, Almighty God the Father

of Heaven is caused the sooner to be meek and shew His mercy ever ready to forgive as soon as we ask forgiveness. For that same said Sacrifice is the very merciful remedy for our sins. As it followeth in the same Psalm, *Quoniam apud te propitiatio est*. Since this Holy Sacrifice may so speedfully move the goodness of Almighty God to mercy and forgiveness, and is the very strength of our penance whereby we may make satisfaction for our grievous trespasses, who will think that His rightwiseness might in any condition be an obstacle against His mercy? The ordinance of His law likewise cannot withstand nor fear¹ us, but ever to have forgiveness if we ask it. Of a truth the law given to the Jews was very fearful and cruel; for that cause, named the law of fear and death. But now all such ceremonies, fearfulness, subjections, and cruelty ordained for breaking of it be past and done. As St. Paul saith, a new law is made and published, which is the law of liberty and grace, the law of life and mercy. Of the old law given by Moses, St. Paul writeth in this manner: *Irritam quis faciens legem Moisi sine ulla miseratione duobus aut tribus testibus moritur*: "Whosoever did break the law of Moses, witness had of two or three, should die without mercy." Take heed how unmerciful the law of Moses was. But what is written in Christ's law? *Pœnitentiam agite, et appropinquabit regnum cœlorum*: "Do penance for your sins and ye shall be saved." Behold, by the law of Christ our Saviour, Almighty God will be meek and exercise His mercy if we do penance. And because every penitent should ever be in surety of the same, the great authority to forgive sin is left here amongst us in the Church of Christ; and the power of the same given to priests, that they by that authority may assoil every true penitent and forgive all their sins. Which is authorised by the words written in Christ's law: *Quorum remisertis peccata, remittuntur eis*: "Whose sins soever ye forgive," here in this Church Militant, be they never so grievous," the same shall be forgiven in Heaven." Therefore whatsoever sinner will go with a contrite heart unto

¹ frighten.

a priest, shew to him all his sins without gloss or colour, and meekly do after his counsel in making recompense for his grievous offences, shall be made clean from all sin by the virtue of the Sacrament of Absolution. This is a meek and merciful law of our Saviour Christ Jesu, Son to the omnipotent Father of Heaven. We may not in any condition break this gentle law; for whosoever be found as a transgressor of it shall deserve great indignation of God. Who breaketh this law of Christ? Truly, they which presume and be more bold to sin because the mercy of God is so prompt and ready. Let us all therefore beware for the reverence of the dreadful Majesty of God, and ever apply ourselves to do after His merciful law. For if we now, in this time of grace, break His commandments, our transgressions be so much the more. Notwithstanding, if at any season, for lack of taking heed or by our frailty, we do a trespass against His goodness, let us never despair of forgiveness nor go utterly away from our Blessed Lord, but stick fast, lean to Him, and hold up ourselves in trust of His merciful forgiveness. Like a post set to a wall, although it seem to hold up that wall, yet the post hath more succour from falling down by¹ the wall than the wall hath by it; for if the wall were not, the post should soon slip to the earth. Likewise if we will lean, cleave, or stick fast with a steadfast mind and trust in the great mercy of Almighty God, in manner as we might hold Him up in us, we shall be sustained and supported in our so doing rather by Him. Then may we say well this that followeth, *Et propter legem tuam sustinui te, Domine.*

Hitherto we have shewed that neither our sins nor the rightwiseness of God, neither the ordinance of His law may withstand, but alway true penitents shall have forgiveness. Now in this second place we shall make demonstration of the same by His own word and promise in Holy Scripture. Although we may shew much for it in Scripture, yet this one shall now suffice. God Almighty promised by His prophet Ezechiel that every true penitent, willing to forsake his sinful life, should have for-

¹ deriving from.

giveness, and never after his wickedness to be laid to his charge. These be His words: *Convertimini et agite pœnitentiam ab omnibus iniquitatibus vestris et non erit vobis in ruinam iniquitas*: "Be ye turned from your sinful life, do penance for your sins; and they never after shall be imputed to you; ye shall never be damned." May any sinner, be he never so wicked fall in despair, remembering with steadfast hope this general promise made by Almighty God? What doth the sinner dread more than eternal damnation? By whose authority shall he suffer that pain but only by the authority and commandment of Almighty God? If God command it there is no remedy, no fleeing may serve, no succour may then be had; for His commandment must needs be obeyed and abiden by. But Almighty God of His goodness commanded rather the contrary, saying *Convertimini et agite pœnitentiam*, &c.: "Be ye turned from your sinful life, do penance for all your offences, and ye shall never be damned." Take heed these be His words. Shall we not believe them? Be they not written to all sinners? Shall we not give credence to Almighty God? Truly, we must needs believe whatsoever He said. *Quia fidelis Dominus omnibus verbis suis*: "For God is true in all His words." Let us therefore trust verily in His saying; and, in hope of the same, let us hold up ourself from falling into the deep dungeon of despair, that every one of us may say *Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus*: "My soul is succoured from despair by steadfast hope and trust in the promise of Almighty God." His great power doth much fortify His promise, for if God were not Almighty, ever without change, He might not alway keep His promise. We see by experience that the promise and purpose of men be daily and hourly changed, sometime for lack of might, wanting of good, and sometime because the life of men is made shorter by weakness of nature that they may not perform their promises. It is a common proverb—*Homo proponit et Deus disponit*: "Man purposeth and God disposeth." Truly, Almighty God may at His pleasure turn, and dis sever the purpose and intent of every person high or low,

poor or rich. He hath so much strength, so great power, that no creature may withstand it. St. Paul saith *Voluntati ejus quis resistit?* "Who may resist the will of God?" And in another place: *Scio cui credidi, et certus sum quia potens est depositum meum servare:* "I know in Whom I have believed, and am sure He is of power to keep His promise with me." Not only St. Paul affirmeth this, but also all Holy Scripture. It is written in the Book of Sapience: *Respice, filii, nationes hominum et scitote quia nullus speravit in Domino et confusus est:* "All people take heed and know for a surety that from the beginning of the world unto this hour never creature putting his whole trust in our merciful Lord God was utterly confounded." If we should trust to have forgiveness and obtain it not, were it not a great confusion to us? What might be a greater rebuke or shame than to stand before the terrible face of Almighty God, in the presence of His angels and all the whole company of Heaven, trusting to be one of their number, notwithstanding impulsed and cast down into eternal damnation? Truly, none so great confusion. Alas what shall we wretches do? What more shameful and opprobrious thing may happen to any person than to be shamefully confounded in the presence of so glorious a multitude? O most merciful Lord, Thy Scripture sheweth never creature was confounded that trusted in Thee. *Nullus speravit in Domino et confusus est:* "No person trusting in God was at any time confounded." O most meek Lord, shall we be first brought to confusion? Peradventure we be not so sorrowful and penitent for our offences as other nations were; notwithstanding, our desire is to be as penitent as they; our will is good, we would fain be true penitents. And if our sorrow and penance be not so great as they ought to be, Blessed Lord, Thy goodness may increase and make it more. Therefore we meekly beseech Thee grant us true and sufficient penance, whereby we may verily trust to be the children of salvation according to Thy promise; also that we may have full confidence in Thine infinite power, by the which Thou may truly keep Thy said great

promise, to the intent all we may say *Speravit anima mea in Domino*: "The hope and trust of my soul is all-whole in our Lord." Perchance some person will say: 'I know well God is true and mighty to fulfil His promise, also I doubt not in the performing of the same. But when Almighty God hath once forgiven a sinner, it is sufficient for observing His promise. And if the sinner fall again, God is discharged and no more bound to forgive him.' Perchance some man will think thus in himself, namely when our adversary the devil putteth such a thought to his mind, whereby he may the sooner bring him into despair. Whosoever thinketh so, thinketh falsely: as we shall prove. For in the Gospel of Luke we be taught to forgive, not only one time, but as often as our neighbour offendeth against us. Our Saviour saith *Si peccaverit in te frater tuus, increpa illum, et si pœnitentiam egerit, dimitte illi: et si septies in die peccaverit in te et septies in die conversus fuerit ad te dicens Pœnitet me, dimitte illi*: "If thy brother trespass against thee, blame him charitably; and if he be sorry for his trespass, forgive him. Also if he offend seven times on a day and as many times ask forgiveness, so oft forgive him." By these words we be commanded to forgive with all our heart unfeignedly as oft as our neighbour or even-christian¹ doth a trespass against us. Shall God be more meek than man? He must needs. Shall man forgive sooner than Almighty God? Nay, truly. For sith all meekness, mercy, pity, and all goodness is specially in God, who may be so meek and merciful as He is? Our Saviour saith: *Nemo bonus nisi Deus*: "No man is good but only God." That is to say, no man is so utterly pure without dissimulation, without spot of malice, as is Almighty God. Insomuch therefore as no creature is without sin, and yet one will forgive another, much more the God of all goodness, that is so clean without spot or blemish or malice, must exercise His merciful deed so oft as we be penitent and ask forgiveness; which He promised, saying: *Dimitte et dimitetur vobis*: "Forgive and ye shall be forgiven." And

¹ fellow-christian.

in another place *Qua mensura mensi fueritis remetietur vobis*: "Even as ye do to others, so shall ye be done to." By this ye may see that they err much and go from the truth which think Almighty God will not forgive more than once. For though we sin never so grievously and oft, if at any time by penance we will turn again to Him, meekly asking forgiveness, it shall not be denied us. But of a truth we must ask mercy or¹ we die; for by cruel death the light of the day, the time of forgiveness, is utterly taken away from us, and darkness of the night is come, in the which no creature can do that thing whereby he shall obtain mercy. Of this said night our Saviour shewed: *Veniet nox quando nemo potest operari*: "The night shall come when no man may work," or do anything profitable for himself. Therefore as long as we be living in this miserable life, that is to say from our nativity and first coming into this world unto the time that we shall die, so long is the time wherein our penance may be acceptable unto God, and trust verily to have forgiveness. This day or time of mercy is parted in twelve hours, as it is shewed by a parable in the Gospel of John. If thou that art truly penitent will come at any of these hours, Almighty God shall not forsake thee. Whether thou come early or late, trust verily of forgiveness for the asking. Did not the thief in the hour of his death obtain mercy as soon as he called for it? Jonas also, being in jeopardy of death? Ezechias in like wise, whom all physicians judged to die, was forgiven. Nabuchodonosor, which oft forsook and oft turned again to Him, did not our merciful Lord forgive all his trespasses? The prophet David in like manner, after he had committed adultery and manslaughter, yet he fell again to sin, was not Almighty God merciful to him indeed when meekly he acknowledged his grievous offences? Who dare now be so bold to say that God will not forgive the sinner more often than once? It is written: *In quacunque hora ingemuerit peccator, salvus erit*: "At any time when the sinner is sorry for his offences, he shall not be damned." Therefore every hour, early or late, whosoever is penitent

¹ before.

in this life may trust verily to be forgiven of our meek Lord and Master. To the which our prophet exhorteth us, saying *A custodia matutina usque ad noctem speret Israel in Domino*: "Every true penitent trust in our Lord both early and late," that is to say, in every age from the first hour of our coming into this world unto the last when we shall die. Every true penitent may be called Israel, 'a man seeing God,' trusting to have forgiveness of Him. We now may be in a surety that Almighty God shall be merciful to all true penitents. First, because of His promise; second, for He is almighty, whereby He may at all times perform the same; third, because He is so gentle and ever ready to forgive. Now, last, we shall shew that same unable¹ to be spoken of: *Quia apud Dominum misericordia*. The mercy of God cannot be but great, it can never be limited to any creature. Everything that is little and limited to a certain time or number, also by addition or diminution may be made more or less, lacketh perfection; it must needs be imperfect. But all that is attribute or spoken of God is perfect. Therefore His mercy cannot be but great and infinite both in time and number, Whose greatness hath none end, as it is written, *Secundum magnitudinem illius ita et misericordia illius cum ipso est*: "Like as His power and might is without end, so is His mercy." And that His mercy is infinite Scripture sheweth. *Et magnitudinis ejus non est finis*: "The power of God is interminable, or without end." Therefore His mercy must needs be infinite, and alway one, neither more nor less. As St. James saith *Apud Deum nulla est transmutatio nec vicissitudinis obumbratio*: "All thing in God is always one without change." David in like manner sheweth in a Psalm before rehearsed *Tu autem idem ipse es*: "Blessed Lord, Thou art without mutability." Peradventure David meant the same in this Psalm, inso-much he expresseth no time but speaketh absolutely: *Quia apud Dominum misericordia*. Take heed he neither saith the mercy of God is, was, or shall be, signifying that it is infinite. Like as his superexcellent mercy may not

¹ that same quality to be indescribably great in Him.

be comprehended in measure nor number, assemblably¹ it may not be limited to any certain time. But alway every hour, every moment, when the sinner is apt to receive it, Almighty God shall be ready to grant his desire. Which Holy Scripture (sheweth) in another place, saying *Quis invocavit eum, et despexit illum? quoniam pius et misericors est Deus et remittet in die tribulationis peccata:* "Almighty God never despised creature that asked forgiveness, for He is so meek and merciful, ready to forgive when the sinner is contrite for his sinful life." O sweet words, more sweeter than honey and sugar! Blessed Lord, give me grace to make recognition and have it in experience. Thou never despised creature that asked mercy, because Thou art meek and merciful, ready to forgive them that be sorrowful for their offences. Is it not spoken so in Thine Holy Scripture? Is not Thy saying true? Did Thou not make us of nought? Do we not daily ask mercy? Shall we only be expelled? Of a truth our sins be great, but Thy mercy exceedeth all greatness and measure. Our trespasses be many, but no number is of Thy mercy. Our sins many times be renewed after Thou hast forgiven them, notwithstanding, good Lord, Thy mercy is limited to no certain time but ever ready to be received, by and by, of all that be penitent. *Quia apud Dominum misericordia:* "For the mercy of God is infinite." Many times one person may have pity on another, and yet help him nothing at all: as thus. A poor man peradventure goeth into a prison where he seeth many prisoners sore punished with fetters and other engines; by that sight he is moved with pity and mercy, notwithstanding, he hath not wherewith to help them. If Almighty God were in like condition, His mercy should little profit us. But He is not poor, He is most rich. In His treasure-house there is riches innumerable, wherewith also He may redeem all the world from the prison and captivity of the devil. The riches convenient for this redemption is no corruptible gold or silver. As St. Peter saith, it is the very innocent and precious Blood of the

¹ similarly.

incontaminate Lamb Jesu Christ, the only Son of the Father, which made and ordered all other things in the world by measure, weight, and number as Scripture sheweth. *Omnia jeci in numero pondere et mensura.* The physician also commandeth a man to be let blood by a certain measure or quantity. Notwithstanding, our Blessed Lord shed His Blood so plenteously without measure that no drop was left in His Body. And, in probation of the same, both Blood and Water issued from His Heart. Whereas one shedding had been sufficient for the redemption of all sinners (although they be innumerable) yet He was not so content, but with His own will suffered to have it issue out of His most precious Body many more times for our redemption. For anon after His birth in His most tender age He was circumcised, and the flesh of His privy part cut with a sharp stone, where His precious Blood flowed out sufficiently for the redemption of all sinners. Again it was shed before His Passion, when He prayed to His Father on the Mount. At that time His Manhood was in so great agony that the sweat issued out from His face as it had been drops of blood falling down to the ground. Third, when He was bound naked to a pillar and cruelly beaten with scourges, again He bled on every side. Fourth, when His crown made of sharp thorns was fast thrust on His head, and pierced it through on every side, His Blood ran down abundantly by His hair, eyes, forehead, and His cheeks. Fifth, when, after the Jews had scourged Him, they did on His clothes again; which cleaved so sore to His holy Body on every part, when they should be done off, His wounds were so renewed that the Blood issued out afresh as it had never done so before. Sixth, when cruelly without mercy or pity His most tender Body so sore beaten was lift upon the cross, there violently nailed both hands and feet with great and boistous¹ nails of iron. O inflexible and marvellous cruelty of the Jews! How swiftly came the Blood out at that time from those large and great wounds! Seventh, when after all these His side was opened with

¹ coarse, brutal.

a sharp spear, so great a wound was then made that no Blood was left in any part of His most precious Body. In witness whereof water anon issued out with Blood. These be the riches, this is the treasure wherewith the ransom of our redemption was paid, as well for sinners that be past and gone out of this world as for us that are now alive; also for them which be to come, and for all that will ask mercy and forgiveness with true penance. This most precious Blood was shed without measure, without number, as we rehearsed, seven times, (which signifieth all time) to the intent our sins, be they never so great and many, shall in every hour, every moment by the virtue of this precious Blood be cleansed, done away; and we to be partakers of this redemption once done, if at any time in this life we come to Almighty God with true penance asking mercy for our offences. One drop of His Blood, as St. Bernard and St. Anselm beareth witness, had been sufficient for the redemption of all the world, also of many worlds. What may be said of all His precious Blood so oft shed? Shall we not say our redemption is performed to the uttermost? Which our prophet witnesseth by these words: *Et copiosa apud eum redemptio*. Therefore sith the mercy of God is so great, and our redemption so plenteous, who may despair? Namely where we know for a truth that Almighty God of His own voluntary will and gracious volunty both redeemed us and will exercise His mercy when we do ask it. So no fault is in Almighty God, but only in the sinner if he be damned. For, of His great meekness and abundant mercy, He will not that any creature perish, as St. Peter saith, but all to be penitent and return from their sinful life. Almighty God withdraweth the rigour of His rightwiseness and is alway so ready to forgive, that He coveteth more His mercy to be magnified than the power of His justice. Were it not a great blemish to the power of a king, would not the people say shrewdly¹ behind his back, if he promised openly to be venged upon his enemies, and in conclusion would not perform it? It is a common proverb: *Verbum regis*

¹ mischievously.

stet oportet: "A king's word must stand." Our most mighty Lord, in Whom is all strength, threatened by His prophets to destroy His enemies; notwithstanding, when He had all said, regarded more, took more heed, to shew mercy than to His words or the words of His prophets. Insomuch many of the prophets, setting more by their own credence than by the salvation of the people, fled, would not shew as they were commanded. The prophet Jonas after our merciful Lord had delivered him from many great perils (as ye have heard) was sent again to the great city of Ninive to shew the people it should be destroyed within forty days. When the Ninivites heard him say so, the king with all the people began to fast, clothed them in vile garments and were greatly penitent for their unkindness against Almighty God, as we declared in a Psalm before. Almighty God, seeing their great penance, had mercy on them, withdrew His ire and would not do as before He threatened by His prophet Jonas. Behold the great mercy of Almighty God our Lord! When Jonas understood this, called to remembrance the forty days almost gone, perceived nothing toward according as he did threat, thought his credence should never after be set by among the people, was sore vexed in himself that God had so grievously entreated him, and said: 'Good Lord did not I fear this matter or ever I took upon me to shew the people Thy commandment? And for that cause I fled, knowing right well Thou art so merciful, meek, piteous, patient and gentle of Thyself, that when the people call to Thee for mercy Thou wilt forgive their offences. Now, Blessed Lord, since it shall be thus, I pray Thee suffer me no longer to live. I desire to die most of anything.' O great diversity between the condition of God and man! Look well upon the contrariety of their meekness. This mortal man Jonas loved so much himself that his thought was more to keep his credence undefiled than to shew pity or mercy upon other. But Almighty God, the Which is immortal, suffered rather his credence to be hurt than for to be unmerciful upon the penitent people. He made a short answer unto Jonas, and so left him, saying:

'Jonas, hast thou a rightwise cause to be wroth?' After this Jonas descended and went down a little from the city, and made him a shadowing place for his defence against the radiant heat of the sun in the side of a hill, there abiding to hear what should fortune and happen after. Almighty God seeing this, would give him monition of his great foolishness, caused an ivy tree to spring up suddenly round about his bower, whereof Jonas was very glad and took pleasure by the same ivy tree. But Almighty God, which purposed another thing to be shewed by this deed, would not long suffer Jonas to have his pleasure and solace of it. The next night then following, he created and made a worm that did gnaw the root asunder of that ivy tree. And anon as the sun began to shew the operation of his heat, it withered and dried away. Then Jonas had not so great pleasure in the sudden springing of that tree, but his sorrow was much more for the destruction of the same. Insomuch he decreed with himself, what for the heat of the sun, and for anger, so to die. Our merciful Lord, seeing that Jonas was so sore troubled in his mind, on a season said unto him: 'Hast thou yet a just cause to be angry? The loss of this ivy tree which thou never brought forth to thine own labour neither made it to grow, maketh thee sorrowful. Suddenly it sprang, and suddenly it perished. Thou sorrowest now because it is withered away. Mayest thou so do of equity? If the loss of one ivy tree, which thou never made, be so painful to thee, shall not I sorrow the destruction of an hundred and twenty thousand souls created by mine own hands? So many be in this city. Therefore suffer me to look upon the salvation of so many souls, since one ivy tree was to thee so great pleasure? O great merciful deed of our Lord shewed upon His creatures! O inestimable meekness! O mercy so great which no tongue can express! Be creatures never so ungentle, merciless, never so wicked, notwithstanding, He is sorry to see them perish. If after their great offences they will look upon Almighty God again by true and hearty penance, He will gladly admit them to forgiveness, also mercifully He will take

them to Him, and make them partakers of that noble redemption which was performed with the treasure of the precious Blood of His Son Jesus Christ, according to our prophet, saying thus: *Et ipse redimet Israel ex omnibus iniquitatibus ejus.* He shall make every penitent person partaker of His redemption once done, whensoever the sinner will direct his penitent eyes unto Him; for then the sinner may well be called Israel, 'a man seeing God,' whereas before by sin he turned himself away from that most merciful Lord.

Now let us conclude this sermon with a short rehearsal of the same. All ye have heard what we have spoken in it, I pray you remember yourself by how many degrees, and how perilously ever sinner descendeth, slippeth down suddenly, without he take heed, toward the deep pit of Hell. Therefore do penance in this life as soon as ye may, and beseech Almighty God to accept your penance. Trust verily (if ye so do) neither your sins, nor the righteousness of God, neither the ordinance of His holy law shall withstand, but ye may ever be in a surety to have forgiveness; first by His promise, by His great power whereby He may observe the same; last, because He is so ready to forgive every hour and every moment. Without doubt, every sinner, be he never so wicked, by these great benefits of Almighty God may trust verily to have forgiveness, if he do penance and hold up himself by the grace of God from falling down into the deep dungeon of despair. Which our Lord Jesus Christ grant us. Amen.

THE SEVENTH PENITENTIAL PSALM.

DOMINE EXAUDI.

PSALM cxlii

OUR Saviour Christ Jesus shewed in a Gospel of Luke, that a certain man had two sons; the youngest of them desired a portion of his father's substance, which he obtained and had. After that he went into another region far from his father, and there living viciously spent the

said portion of his goods. When this substance was after this manner misspent and gone, fortun'd great hunger to be in that region. Then he, being poor and needy, put himself in service with a certain citizen of that country. This citizen his master sent him unto a village there to keep hogs; where he was sore vexed with hunger, inso-much that he could not have his fill of peasen and oak-corns, that before his face daily the swine did eat. At the last he remembered himself inwardly, and the misery which he suffered, thinking again on his father's household, how plenteously every servant had, also how the least page in the house was served with meat and drink, and he in the meantime perished in a strange land for hunger. For this he made covenant with himself shortly to depart from thence, to go again to his father, acknowledging his fault and misliving, asking forgiveness, and moreover pray his father to take him only as his servant, unworthy to be called his son from that time forward. When he took his journey returning home, it fortun'd so his father espied him coming afar, and anon moved with mercy and fatherly pity went to meet him; at their meeting, took him about the neck and kissed him, commanding his servants to put upon him new clothes, and make ready a great feast. Last, it is shewed with what soft words this good father assuaged and appeased the malicious indignation of his eldest son, that envied the forgiveness of his younger brother. These be the words of our Saviour Christ in a Gospel, spoken to the intent no man should doubt or be ignorant, how great mercy of our Heavenly Father is shewed unto penitent sinners.

This Prodigal Child turning again unto his father, signifieth the penitent sinner being in a strange region far from the Father of Heaven, there misusing His manifold great benefits, and at the last returned with sorrow and penance, asking forgiveness for his offences. Truly, all we be children of the Heavenly Father, and whosoever of us follow worldly vanities, once brought into the usage of the same by the inordinate volupty of sin, without doubt he is then gone into a strange country far from

the Father of Heaven. Every sinner by sin goeth away far from God, and the longer that he continueth in it, the farther is his departing from that Blessed Lord. He destroyeth the substance freely given unto him, by misusing the gifts of God, and following the sensual appetite of his body. No doubt of it: that person is sore crucified in this life with insatiable hunger, whose appetite is much-desirous and set more and more to use the transitory pleasures of this world. Who be the citizens of this region? Truly, none other but devils, whom St. Paul calleth the governors of this world. And whensoever any of us fall into sin, he putteth himself in service with one or other of them. Then he as a master sendeth him into his village. Every evil company may be called a village of the devil. So many villages of this region there be, as are evil companies in it. The sinner is sent to keep hogs, when his mind and study is all set to satisfy himself in the unclean concupiscences of the flesh. Also he coveteth to have his belly-ful of peasen by despising of the holy food of celestial doctrine, and is desirous to use the unclean pleasures of the body, which cannot satisfy him. Moreover, he is returned unto himself by making an inward search in his conscience with a due remembrance of all his offences done; whereby anon he calleth to mind the goodness of Almighty God shewed unto him, and his own unkindness against his Lord and Maker. Also he perceiveth the felicity of them which be the true servants of God and, contrary to that felicity, he knoweth his own wretchedness. Thus he damneth his own error, greatly repenting his great foolishness, and is raised up again by true hope of God's mercy. He, raised up from the filthiness of sin [and] cometh toward the Heavenly Father with the steps of his soul, proclaiming himself sinful and unkind, unworthy to be called His son, and meekly beseeching to be taken as a servant. This most merciful Father, our Lord God, beholding His son coming afar, preventeth him with His grace; He maketh no tarrying, but shortly goeth to meet him, shewing Himself familiarly, and maketh demonstration of a perfect forgiveness; bringeth him into His house,

clotheth him with the garments of grace, maketh him partaker of the slain calf for our redemption (our Saviour Jesus Christ), and last He causeth all his adversaries utterly to go away from him.

Four things there be which we may well consider both in the Prodigal Child, and also in every penitent sinner. First, the far going away from his father. Second, the manner of his coming again. Third, what he shall ask of his father. And, fourth, what reward he shall receive in conclusion. Which four by God's help shall be declared by order in this Penitential Psalm following. And for this purpose we shall make our prayers unto that Blessed Lord.

First, let us call to remembrance by what manner, and in what manner wise, this Prodigal Child came to his father. No doubt of it his coming again was with great repentance and shame of his sinful living, insomuch he, knowing his own unkindness and indignity, had liever be called a servant than a son, saying *Non sum dignus vocari filius tuus*: "Father, mine offence is so great against thee, that I am not worthy to be called thy son." Dear friends, let us have the same affection. Let us remember the benefits of God given unto us. Again, let us call to mind our unkindness, our sins, our unthrifty living, and be ashamed in our abominations. Let us be penitent and with true repentance say, 'We be not worthy to be named the children of Almighty God, to Whom we have made ourselves so unlike by sin.' Let us not name Him our Father with our polluted mouth, but meekly call Him our Lord, saying *Domine, exaudi orationem meam*: "Lord, hear my prayer." Two things of a likelihood should withstand and be against, that sinners be not heard so soon as they should be. First the truth of Almighty God, second His rightwiseness: His truth, where¹ He threatened sinners to die eternally; His rightwiseness, whereby He ordained a due pain, of very right, for every sinner according to his deserving. But doubtless neither of these may let us to be heard, but rather they be our help and succour whereby our merciful

¹ considering that.

Lord shall give audience unto us. Notwithstanding, eternal punishment is promised to all sinners. But again this is truth; if they will be returned from their sinful living, they shall be received unto grace, and their sins never after shall be cast in their teeth. Both must needs be true, for Almighty God affirmeth the same. Therefore of a surety both eternal pain and also forgiveness be promised unto sinners. But how? Verily thus. Eternal damnation is promised to such as will not return and be penitent for their sin. And to them which be repentant and sorrowful for their sins, with a full purpose never after to offend, is promised forgiveness. Almighty God saith *Quandocumque enim peccator ex corde ingemuerit, omnium iniquitatum ejus non recordabor*: "Whensoever a sinner is very contrite and sorrowful for his sins, I shall never after call them to mind." Therefore let us heartily desire of our merciful Lord that He vouchsafe to hear our petition, made with a penitent heart, to the intent His own foresaid words may be verified on us. *Auribus percipe obsecrationem meam in veritate tua*: "Lord, take up my prayer, mercifully accept it." Grant me forgiveness of my sins, like as Thou granted to all true penitent sinners. "Which grant may never be untrue"; it may not be broken in any condition. Also the rightwiseness of God is not so greatly to be feared of wretched sinners, namely of such as hath taken upon them the right way of living (that is to say after God's laws), and be truly repentant for their offences, done and past. The said rightwiseness is unto all those rather a great help and succour, for Almighty God of His fidelity and justice must needs forgive them that be confessed truly and with good will do penance for their sins. St. John the Evangelist saith *Si confiteamur peccata nostra, fidelis est Deus et justus ut remittat nobis peccata nostra et emundet nos ab omni iniquitate*: "If we truly confess our sins and be sorrowful for them, Almighty God, of His fidelity and rightwiseness, is of power and will to forgive us, and at His pleasure may purge us from all our iniquity." For this cause let us instantly ask of Him to be heard in His rightwiseness, saying *Exaudi me*

in tua justitia: "Lord, hear me graciously as Thou art true and rightwise of Thy promise." Further, peradventure we shall give account of His substance received of our Blessed Lord, which we have spent and destroyed, living after the unlawful sensuality of our bodies, like as the Prodigal Child used himself. O which of us can say but he hath received of Almighty God many great benefits and gifts, both in soul and body with other? But first let us remember the great benefits of Almighty God in things concerning the body as a succour, without the which it could not live. How many true and faithful servants of God be there in the world which lack bread whereby they might repress their hunger; drink, for to staunch their thirst; clothes, for to cover their nakedness; fire, for to assuage their great cold; beds to refresh their weary limbs? How many also want liberty, being in prisons sore bound, peradventure with chains of iron? Hard it is to number them. But contrariwise (loved be God!) we be not so hardly bested; we neither lack meat, drink, clothes, fire, bed, nor liberty, but in every need all these be abundantly ready for us at hand. To assuage our hunger we have great plenty of delicate meats; against thirst we have divers kinds of drinks; to cover our nakedness, divers apparels; against the bitter cold storms, fuel at the full to make fire. And so oft as our pleasure is to lie down and rest us, we have a soft bed well decked with goodly coverings. We have liberty to go where we will, either on horseback or on foot; we be neither tied by the hands nor feet. Such as are straitly kept in prison, set in a stinking dark dungeon, bound with fetters of iron and for lack of meat like to die for hunger, naked without clothes, in the sharp cold winter no fire to succour them,—these persons have good cause why to know how great and pleasant these said benefits be.

Let us now speak of the goodness belonging unto the body as members unto the same. How many lack their arms, feet, hands, and other features of their bodies; else, the flesh eaten away with divers sores and infirmities? How many be deprived from their beauty which

sometime were well favoured of face, and well proportioned in every part of their bodies? How many lie in streets and bye-ways full of carbuncles and other incurable botches, which also we daily perceive at our eye, grievous to behold? How many be crucified (in manner) by intolerable aches of bones and joints, with many other infirmities? And how many, I pray you, be blind, deaf and dumb? Such as are troubled in this manner with these incommodities rehearsed, understand perfectly the commodities wherewith we be endued. Beside these the which be vexed with French-pox, poor and needy, lying by the high-ways, stinking and almost rotten above the ground, having intolerable ache in their bones, perceive how much we be bound to our Blessed Lord for His manifold great benefits given unto us.

Last, the goodly and profitable gifts given unto the soul be many, and much to be made of. We may see innumerable creatures that want Reason, Memory, and Liberty of Will, which three be parts of the image of God, wherewith the soul of man is made noble. We see also many that have these gifts; notwithstanding, they want the good use of them: as thus, they neither can speak nor do anything in a convenient order. Some there be whose wit is so dull that in no manner they cannot perceive a thing taught unto them. Many have so slippery a mind that cannot keep in memory a thing shewed unto them, by the space of an hour. The will of some is so crooked, so froward, so intractable, that in what company soever they be, it is grievous and tedious unto them. I speak not yet of foolishness, imprudent affections and other vices which doubtless be great incommodities unto us, and their contraries are marvelous great benefits. How great benefits they be, is perceived by the native foolishness of the fool, whom daily we behold; which should be in worse condition than any unreasonable beast, if he might have his own will. Further, of Whom had we the benefits? Who gave them unto us? Truly, our most loving Father, Almighty God. It was our fortune to have this goodly portion of substance, these rich treasures, which peradventure many

of us hath spent and destroyed unprofitably; not alway to the honour and pleasure of our blessed Lord but, contrariwise, rather to His shame and rebuke, so much as lieth in us. Alas, what shall we do? How shall we behave ourself, when our Father and Lord shall ask account at the dreadful day of His strait judgment, how we have ordered our portion of substance, every man according to his receipt? Therefore let us come before our said Father by true confession and penance for our sins, calling ourselves unworthy to be named His children. Would God we might be his true servants and not come into that judgment with Him! Let us say *Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo*. Blessed Lord, give us grace in this life to spend the portion of substance which we received of Thy goodness, that at the fearful day of doom whereunto all we shall be cited, Thou lay nothing unto our charges, whereby we should utterly be condemned and put out from Thy blessed company. For if it be Thy will to call us unto that strait examination, truly neither we nor any other person may escape without condemnation; for all be sinners; none can excuse himself, and say he hath not offended Thy goodness. St. John saith *Si dixerimus quia non peccavimus, mendacem illum facimus*: "If we say we have not sinned, we make our Saviour Christ a liar," Which taught us to pray unto the Father by these words: *Dimitte nobis debita nostra*: "Blessed Lord, forgive us our debts." Which be our debts? Truly our sins, wherefore we shall endure and suffer without any doubt eternal damnation, if that they be not forgiven or ever we depart out of this world. No man may excuse him but he is bound in these debts, that is to say in sins. For if any man can say the contrary, then our Saviour taught us not right when He shewed that we should ask pardon, forgiveness and release of all our sins. Job, that was both good and right-wise, said *Si justificare me voluero, os meum condemnabit me*: "If I would justify my own self, my words shall condemn me." For this cause who may think himself able and worthy to come into judgment with Almighty God? For if St. John, the elect virgin and particularly

beloved child of our Blessed Lord, was not clean without every spot of sin; if also the good liver Job should be condemned in that strait judgment, much more we then shall be straitly justified. Therefore let us all pray effectually, insomuch his dearly beloved children (be they never so good) are not sufficiently able for to plead with Him in judgment, that He vouchsafe not to call us, scant able to be His servants, unto the straitness of it. *Quia non justificabitur in conspectu tuo omnis vivens*: "Blessed Lord God, deal not straitly with me in Thy fearful judgment and doom to come, for no creature living, of his own merits, shall be able to come afore Thy sight." Moreover let us acknowledge and confess, to our great shame, unto what ungracious citizen we have put ourselves in service in the region and country so far from our Heavenly Father, Almighty God. Whosoever is the true and faithful servant of God, as we all ought and should be, his conversation is in Heaven and the Heavenly citizens there being in joy. He is also exempt from the region of this world, whereof the devil is prince and chief captain. Christ our Saviour called the devil prince of this world, saying *Princeps hujus mundi*. And St. Paul calleth devils the rulers and governors of sinful souls. He that followeth the vanities of it, goeth into a far region away from God, misusing the goodly and profitable gifts of that Blessed Lord. He is also troubled with insatiable hunger, for the more that his appetite is set to get worldly goods and pleasures, the greater is his desire to increase the same. Insomuch he hath put himself in service to one of these citizens (that is to say, to a devil) the which promiseth him many things, but all be false, vain, and perilous, whereby he is about to devour the soul. Our wits be set to get worldly delectations, and the flesh is fixed in the same purpose; so in the mean season the silly¹ soul doth perish. No man will call this citizen the devil but² a cruel enemy. In the Gospel he is so named, where is said *Inimicus homo venit, et superseminavit zizania*. He hath this name not without a cause, for ever he is purposing to destroy the soul, which

¹ poor dear.² anything but.

is most dear and precious unto a man above all things. We therefore that be vexed with like persecutions may say *Quia persecutus est inimicus animam meam*: "The devil, our cruel enemy, daily pursueth to destroy our souls." Beside this he hath sent us into his village, there to keep hogs. The devil putteth every sinner into that vile office, which is his servant and so will continue. What may better be understood by the uncleanness of hogs or swine than the filthy appetite of the flesh? Those most unclean sinners whose affection is set in fleshly pleasures ought of a more congruence to be called swine than the hogs which daily walter themselves in mire and clay. Wherefore St. Peter saith *Sus lota in volutabro luti*: "The sinner is like unto a sow soused in dirt and mire." O we Christian people, whose life is made so vile by vices, what condition be we in, which are made like unto the image of God, redeemed with the most precious Blood of Christ, right inheritors of heaven! Notwithstanding, we have forsaken our most loving father, and chosen a lord most ungracious and cruel adversary unto Him. This adversary setteth us in the office of keeping swine, that is to say in following the libidinous appetite of the flesh, unable to be satiate. O miserable vility!¹ O how detestable condition be we in. Let us therefore cry unto our merciful Father, busily ask His help and shew our misery unto Him, saying *Humiliavit in terra vitam meam*. This enemy the devil "hath humbled my life," hath set me in a vile office following worldly pleasures and the filthy desires of the flesh. The devil our adversary is not only content to set us in this low and vile office, but also he hath taken away the light of doing good works, and overcovered us with darkness, that is to say, with worldly concupiscence. So by his means we be made oblivious of our Heavenly Father and His manifold benefits, forgetting ourself, not regarding the health of our souls, in manner as mad people, more like dead than alive. For all such as be illumined with grace are alive, and have understanding to order themselves in the pleasure of God. But all other that lack grace be

¹ meanness, *villé*.

dead spiritually, whose minds be alway set to fulfil their beastly life, and nourish their wits with vain delectations, marvellously blinded by the devils and rulers of this region the world, which many times in Holy Scripture is named the region of death. St. Paul saith *Tenebris obscuratum habentes intellectum: alienati a vita Dei*: Such manner people as followeth the pleasures of this world "be in darkness, having an obscure understanding, and alienate from the life of Almighty God." For this let us add unto our complaint, that followeth, *Collocavi me in obscuris sicut mortuos sæculi*: Our adversary the devil "hath set us in the darkness of vices," taken away our good understanding, "and made us as dead without grace."

Hitherto we have shewed of the sinners far going away from God; now let us hear of his returning again. Be the sinner never so much blinded with the deceits of the devil, notwithstanding, some spark remaineth in the soul that cannot lightly be extinct and quenched: as much to say, the superior portion of the soul, which alway striveth against sin. Also it enticeth the body, so much as it may, to do good, if we be disposed for to hear it, and for to do thereafter. But many persons there be the which give more attendance to other vain things, wherewith they are busily occupied, and forget themselves. Such manner of people be rather present with those transitory things than with themselves. St. Augustine saith: "The mind and thought of man is more where he loveth than with himself." Would God these manner disposed people would at the last return, hear, see, and make due search what is done in their consciences, like as we have shewed of this Prodigal Child; which after his offence came again to himself, and knew all his miseries. Would God every one of us were in will to remember the trouble of his own soul, the which the inward conscience doth suffer, to the intent all we might say with the prophet, that followeth, *Anxius est super me spiritus meus*. I know verily by the search made in my conscience how grievously I have trespassed against my Lord God, "wherewith my soul is sore

grieved." This remembrance doubtless is beginning of the sinners true conversion to Almighty God. For, of a truth, when he calleth to mind (as we have shewed) his miserable errors wherein he hath been wrapped by continuance in the same a long time; that remembrance continually had, he cannot but greatly repent his own foolishness; namely if he remember Whom he hath forsaken and into whose danger he is fallen, also call to mind his loss how great it is, and how much unprofitable is his winning. He hath not forsaken angel, man, or any other creature. Whom then? Truly, Almighty God, the Maker of all creatures, Which also created every thing of nought and is most mighty, most liberal, best, and most fair. This Blessed Lord is to be set by above all things; He is to be loved best, for His inenarrable goodness, although He had never done more for us. But above these He maketh Himself our Father: *Qui proprio et naturali filio non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus morti tradidit illum*: "Which also, for great love, spared not His own natural Son, but gave Him to suffer death for the redemption of us all." The sinner hath forsaken this most kind and loving Father, following the devil, most cruel enemy to all mankind, also most fearful, most envious, author of all sins and mischief. What profit hath the sinner gotten by his long continuance in wickedness? Truly, nothing else but dishonesty and great filthiness of the soul, with eternal damnation, out of the which he shall never be delivered without amendment in this life. He hath beside these lost eternal life and joys everlasting. O wretched sinners! If any of us had lost a great sum of money, condemned to have his head stricken off, if he either were fallen into the danger of his most cruel enemy, lost his best loving friend, would he not sorrow much? Should he not be sore vexed in his mind? Yes, of a likelihood. Therefore, let us return to our conscience, there to hear these said damages, that we may wail and sorrow with true penance, saying unto our Father of Heaven *In me turbatum est cor meum*: "Blessed Lord, my heart is sore

troubled," my wisdom is confused. I am sorry and penitent for my trespass done against Thy goodness.

Forasmuch as a man may take too great sorrow, and by his doing perchance fall into desperation, therefore a remedy must be had, which is the remembrance of good hope and trust of forgiveness. And this shall soon be done, if we call to mind how great the mercy is of our Heavenly Father. Doubtless mankind, that is so crooked and prone to sin, must, of very right, be brought unto a fear and dread by the grievous punishment of God; like as the custom and usage was in the time of the old law; for then whosoever did break the law, two or three witnesses testifying the same, was anon judged to die without mercy or forgiveness. Notwithstanding, our most merciful Lord could not but exercise His mercy in that same cruel season; for many times by His prophets He promised forgiveness to all true penitent sinners. It is written in *Jeremias* *Te peccata et cum peccatoribus multis, domine redire ad me et ego incipiam te*: "Thou sinful person, hast offended many times, following the unlawful desires of thy body, yet turn again to me and I shall receive thee." O merciful saying of our Blessed Lord! In another place it is written also *Si penitentiam egerit gens ista a malo suo, agam et ego penitentiam super malo quod cogitavi ut facerem ei*: "If the people will do penance for their offences, I shall withdraw my great punishment, (or else) I shall not punish them as I had thought to have done." Now, forasmuch as Almighty God was so merciful in the time of cruelty, when Moses' law was put in execution, how plenteously shall He exercise His mercy now in this time of grace! Shall not Almighty God, Father of all comfort, be more ready to shew mercy on sinners and call them again to grace? Yes, doubtless. For this cause the remembrance of His mercy shewed in the time of the old law is much profitable for us in very hope and trust to be forgiven. Therefore it followeth *Memor fui dilectionem antiquorum*: "Good Lord, I have at all seasons had in mind the time of the old law," when no mercy might be had for any transgressors of it. I re-

member how merciful Thou were at that time. Another cause of good hope is this. Let us make search through the works of God universally, and we shall find in all them abundant mercy and pity. I beseech you, how oft shewed He mercy in deed upon the people of Israel when they sinned above measure? How mercifully dealt He with the kings David, Nabuchodonosor, Achab, and Ezechiah? With the people also, as is witnessed in Holy Scripture, of the Ninivites? What mercy shewed this Blessed Lord on Peter, the which denied him? What to Paul, which pursued Him, Mary Magdalen, the woman taken in adultery, what to the publican, also to the thief, a manqueller, with other innumerable? No man of this is ignorant. Scripture saith *Suavis Dominus universis et miserationes ejus super omnia opera ejus*: "Our Lord is merciful unto all people" that will receive mercy, "and His merciful deeds be spread upon all His works." In everything that God doth is suavity and mercy. That is shewed in another place: *Universæ viæ Domini misericordia et veritas*: "All the ways of God be grounded upon mercy and truth." The remembrance of this inenarrable mercy on all His works, may cause us to have good hope and trust of forgiveness. For this is added *Et meditatus sum in omnibus operibus tuis*: "Blessed Lord, I call to mind how merciful Thou art in all Thy works": which is to me a special trust to obtain forgiveness.

But now, considering this, why do we not haste ourselves? Why rise we not from sin and come unto our merciful Father of Heaven, as this Prodigal Child did to his father? Is peradventure anything yet behind? Yea, truly. For this Prodigal Child, remembering his own misery, thought upon the servants in his father's household, how plenteously they were fed. So likewise we must remember our own wretchedness and also the felicity of those creatures being in service and household of our Heavenly Father. This Prodigal Child said *Quanti mercenarii in domo patris mei abundant panibus: ego autem hic jame pereor*: "How many servants be in my father's house, how abundantly be they served with meat and drink, and I like a wretch die here for hunger!"

A lily is but a small thing in reputation; it hath neither reason nor understanding: yet noble king Solomon in all his royalty was never clad with so fair a colour and beauty. Which our Saviour shewed in a Gospel of Luke, saying *Considerate lilia agri, &c. Amen. dico vobis Solomon in omni gloria sua non fuit vestitus sicut unum ex his*: "Look upon the lilies and fair flowers of the field: I tell you plainly," saith our Saviour, "Solomon in all his glory was never so beauteous as one of them." Sparrows be but small birds and little set by among men: *Et unus tamen ex eis non est in oblivione coram Deo, sed et capilli omnes capitis numerati sunt*: "Notwithstanding, none of them is out of mind before God. All the hairs of our heads be numbered and had in His memory." Therefore our most Blessed Lord taketh heed of every creature. Also the least is not out of His remembrance. He maketh provision for them all. As the prophet David shewed in a Psalm, saying *Omnia a te expectant ut des illis escam in tempore: aperiente te manum tuam omnia implebuntur bonitate*: "Blessed Lord, all creatures abide upon Thy goodness, all have their being and food of Thee in time. And when it is Thy pleasure to put forth and open Thy plenteous hands, all shall be satiate and content with nourishing convenient for them." Be not men and women much more set by with Almighty God than all unreasonable creatures? Was not everything made and created for man's cause?¹ Doubtless so it was. Then forasmuch as Almighty God taketh charge and provideth for all other creatures, how great care, shall we think, hath He upon His reasonable creatures, whom He made like to His own image? Therefore let us remember that followeth, saying *In factis manuum tuarum meditabar*: "Lord, I bear in mind how comfortable Thou art to all Thy creatures," none of them be had in oblivion with Thee. Now thus, when a sinner perceiveth the sorrow of his soul, also the inward remorse of his conscience, and by that is made woeful and penitent, when he persuadeth with himself to ask mercy of his Father, (remembering the providence so plen-

¹ sake.

teously ordered for all his Father's servants), and beholdeth himself forsaken by his own defaults, will he not shortly rise up and go unto his Father, acknowledging his error and trespass? Shall he not lowly meek himself, and desire for to be forgiven and pardoned of his great unkindness? The which this said Prodigal Child fulfilled, after all these considerations, as is shewed when he said *Surgam et ibo ad patrem meum dicamque: Pater, peccavi*: "I shall rise and forsake my sinful life, go unto my Father acknowledging my grievous offence and say, Father I have sinned against thee." Ah wretched sinners, why tarry we any longer? Why do we not rise from our wickedness and forsake our sinful life? Why do we not offer ourself unto the Father of mercy? Let us lift up our minds, saying unto him *Expandi manus meas ad te*: "I have spread my hands abroad," that is to say, I have changed my life by doing many good works, whereas before I gave myself to the vain pleasures and delectations of this world. And, for to shew more openly the inward desire of our minds, let us bring to remembrance the pleasures of this world, how vain they be, and how shortly they vanish away as doth a shadow. For the more that any person hath a steadfast pleasure and delectation in them, the more is his desire to increase the same, and the less is he satisfied: like as our Saviour said unto the woman Samaritan *Qui bibit ex aqua hæc sitiet iterum*: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall be thirsty again." That is as much to say, what manner of persons soever they be that is inordinately desirous for to have worldly pleasures, delectations and riches shall never be satisfied and appetited; but ever his appetite shall be to have more and more, never content. But there is another manner liquor, and, if a man drink no more but once of it, he shall be satisfied and replenished abundantly, and never after be thirsty; the which liquor issueth out from the river of all pleasure, wherewith all blessed people be given drink, and plenteously are satiate in Heaven. It is written: *Satiabor quum apparuerit gloria tua*: "Blessed Lord, I shall be fully content, I shall have pleasure at will, when Thy joy shall appear";

that is to say, at such time as I shall be associated with Thy blessed company in Heaven. Almighty God is the fountain of this said pleasure and most delicate liquor, the which liquor all blessed souls desire fervently to have. Among whom one said *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum: ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus*: "Blessed Lord, like as the wild hart," after he hath drunk poison, "desireth to come unto the fresh springing fountain," for his singular remedy and comfort, "even so doth my soul," after the remembrance of my sin, "desire for to come unto Thee," by the fountain of penance. Now sith it is so we know this most delicious liquor, and where it is, let us therefore spread our souls abroad desiring to be satiate with it, whereof ourself we be void from all moisture of goodness, and alienate from all virtue. Our saying shall be this, as it followeth, *Anima mea sicut terra sine aqua tibi*: "Like as the earth, of his nature without moisture is dry and barren, so is my soul of itself void from all goodness"; wherefore, Blessed Lord, vouchsafe to water it with the liquor of Thy grace, to the intent it may finally come unto Thine everlasting bliss.

Hitherto ye have heard the fall of the sinner, also his rising again. Now farther let us give heed to know what his desire shall be of Almighty God. First he prayeth to be heard; also that God would vouchsafe to look upon him with the eye of His mercy, defend him from his enemies; and, last, maketh his petition to have instruction how he may fulfil the pleasure and will of our Lord God. He sheweth reasons why to be heard in all these.

When a poor man cometh to a prince, not accustomed to shew himself in the presence of noble men, anon he is smitten with fear, waxeth pale in the face, quaketh for dread, and is so sore abashed that in manner he wotteth not what to say; his spirit beginneth to fail him. We daily have this in experience, not only in those the which be bashful and weak-spirited, but also in them which be bold of spirit. We read of Queen Saba, both wise and of great power, when she beheld the nobleness of King Solomon both in his wisdom and many other great gifts,

although she came for to attempt him in many dark questions, notwithstanding, she was in manner beside herself, seeing his great royalty, and almost wist not what to say. O Jesu, how shall the poor soul behave itself, deformed with so many sins when it shall come to the fearful presence of God's High Majesty? When it shall appear before the Highness of Almighty God, presented unto that fearful King that taketh away the spirit and boldness of worldly princes and rulers? All earthly kings fear Him. No marvel it is if then the silly soul be sore abashed and wot not what to say, namely if the petition be not readily heard. For this let every sinner say unto God: *Velociter exaudi me, Domine; defecit spiritus meus*: "Lord, hear me shortly, for my spirit faileth me."

But after that a king or prince is ready to give audience to a poor creature, if also he look not on him with a gentle and merry countenance but shew himself ireful against his subject and beseecher, not only then his spirit shall fail him for fear, but also his strength shall be taken away, not able to sustain his body, but fall down to the ground. For Solomon said: *Indignatio regis nuntius mortis est*: "The indignation of a king is a messenger and token of death." And contrariwise *In hilaritate vultus regis vita*: "By a king's cheerful countenance is signified life." Since the indignation of a mortal king is so great, how great is the indignation of Almighty God, a King immortal! How many have despaired for fear of His indignation and punishment, which they deserved to have, and so in conclusion slipped down into the deep pit of Hell? And again how many by the reason of sin were drawn backward unto Hell, notwithstanding, being comforted with the hope of His mercy, they were erected unto eternal life? For this every penitent sinner must ask this petition of Almighty God, saying *Ne avertas faciem tuam a me et similis ero descendentibus in lacum*: "Blessed Lord, turn not away Thy face, but look upon me with a merciful cheer and countenance; give me grace and virtue that I be not like and semblable unto them the which by the sin of despair do fall into eternal damnation."

But if a mighty prince or great estate will look upon his subject with never so mercy-and-cheerful look and countenance, and in conclusion exercise and shew no mercy nor pity upon him, what avail or profit is that unto the said poor man? Truly, but very little. Therefore mercy is to be required and asked in the third place. Almighty God is merciful above all other, and hath more affection unto mankind than the husband hath unto the wife, the mother to the child, or the father unto his son. Of a truth great love must be between the husband and his wife. For it is written *Relinquet homo patrem et matrem et adhaerebit uxori suae*: "A man once married, according to God's law, shall forsake his father and mother, and keep him unto his wife"; as much to say, love his wife better than his father and mother. Many causes there be why a man may put his wife away from him with right; and, so put away, if she come again, he may utterly reject her. But Almighty God loveth us with a more constant mind. For if we sin never so often, never so grievously against Him, yet if we will return He anon taketh us unto Him at all times; witness His own words spoken by His holy prophet Jeremias, saying *Si dimiserit vir uxorem suam et recedens ab eo duxerit virum alterum, numquid revertetur ad eam ultra*? "If a man leave his wife, and she so gone away take another husband, shall he take her again? Is not that woman contaminated and polluted? But what sayeth Almighty God more? *Tu autem fornicata es cum amatoribus multis: tamen revertere ad me, dicit Dominus, et ego suscipiam te*: "Thou, sinful person, hast offended with many lovers, yet turn again and I shall take thee to mercy." Here we see that God loveth us much more constantly than a man doth his wife. Also it is manifest how tenderly those that are mothers do love their children, by the great labours and adversities which they suffer for their causes, to bring and nourish them forth in this world. But Almighty God is far above them in loving, for when the mothers perceive and feel the unkindness of their children, anon they forget them. Almighty God dealeth not so with us; which He confirmed by His

prophet Isaie, saying: *Numquid potest mulier oblivisci infantem suum ut non misereatur filio uteri sui? Et si illa oblita fuerit, ego tamen non obliviscar tui*: "May a woman forget her infant, or child, and not be merciful unto the child born of her own body? And if she do at any time, for unkindness shewed, yet," saith our Lord, "I shall not forget thee, be thou never so unkind," if thou wilt ask mercy. Therefore we be more dearly beloved of God than children be of their mothers. Last, fathers whose love is longer-during and more constant unto their children, be not to be compared unto the love of Almighty God. No carnal father may love his child better than our Heavenly Father loveth us. It is written *Quomodo miseretur pater filiorum, ita misertus est Dominus timentibus se*: "As the carnal father is merciful unto his children, so our Lord God Almighty is merciful unto all that fear Him." And doubtless He is much more merciful, as Christ shewed in a Gospel, speaking unto carnal fathers, *Si vos quum sitis mali noscitis data bona dare filiis vestris, quanto magis Pater vester coelestis dabit spiritum bonum petentibus se*? "If ye carnal fathers, being evil of yourself, can find in your hearts to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father, Which is All-good and itself Goodness, reward them with His grace that will ask it?" This thing appeared well in this Prodigal Child when he came toward his father to ask forgiveness. Anon his father beholding his coming afar was moved with mercy, went toward his child, and at their meeting took him about the neck and kissed him. O singular love of a father! O great pity, not a little to be marvelled of! Let us wretched sinners return from our sinful life, come unto our Heavenly Father like as this Prodigal Child did, ask mercy with true penance and hope of forgiveness: for else we cannot have it. This shall be our saying: *Auditam fac mihi mane misericordiam tuam, quia in te speravi*: "Blessed Lord, grant that I may obtain Thy mercy shortly when I call for it with true penance and hope of forgiveness. For why? I have ever trusted in Thee."

But whensoever a sinner hath obtained mercy of Al-

mighty God, his cause is then the more to take heed, with as diligent study as he can, lest peradventure he offend again, and so be in worse case than he was before. This iteration to sin may happen three manner wise. First, by ignorance of the good rule and custom that he ought to use, being in clean life, for the continuance of the same. Second, the crafty means of his enemies may perchance cause him to return to sin, after he hath knowledge of this said good order and custom. Third, by his frailty and readiness to sin he may offend again. He maketh petitions following, to be defended from these said three perils.

Almighty God hath ever been so merciful unto all such as call to Him with a true mind, unfeignedly and for a good intent, to give them knowledge in things that be doubtful. This appeared manifestly in the noble man called Cornelius, the centurion, which although he was a Gentile and not learned in the manner of Jews nor of Christian people, nevertheless he prayed to God busily to have knowledge of the right and true way. Our most gentle Lord sent unto him an angel, which gave unto him monition to go unto Simon Peter, of whom he should know all his desire. Also a certain man named Philip, a chief ruler of a town called Gaza; this said Philip gave himself many times to pray, and on a time as he went to Jerusalem in pilgrimage, it fortuned that St. Philip the Apostle, by the commandment of God, companied with him by the way, taught him the manner and law of Christ whereof he was ignorant before. And why did Almighty God shew to these persons the way which they should follow, but only because their minds were lift up unto Him, calling for help in the way of truth, for a good intent and without feigning? For it is written in another place *Prope est Dominus omnibus invocantibus eum: omnibus invocantibus eum in veritate*: "Our Lord is nigh unto all that call unto Him, namely to all such as call unto Him in truth." Therefore let every sinner, not willing to continue and err in the darkness of ignorance, go unto Almighty God by prayer, say unto Him with an whole mind (not speaking one thing and

think another) these words following: *Notam fac mihi viam in qua ambulem quia ad te levavi animam meam*: "Lord give me knowledge, shew me the way wherein I shall walk," give me instruction of Thy commandments, "for I have lift up my mind unto Thee."

Beside this, when the sinner knoweth the right way wherein he shall walk fulfilling God's commandments, yet it may fortune him to fear lest his enemies, which have laid in his way guileful baits, bring him out of that way, and make him to err again. The devils, our great enemies, be very strong. Scripture saith *Non est potestas super terram quæ comparetur eis*: "None earthly power may be compared to them." And when they perceive a sinner leave his sinful way and follow the order of true penance, then is their full purpose set to contrive how to bring him out of that way by their vain deceits, which none earthly creature may resist without the help of our most mighty Lord God, at Whose sight all they tremble and flee. He only may be our succour and help against these most cruel enemies. Almighty God is as a strong Tower for our defence against all adversaries: *Turris fortitudinis a facie inimici*. Whosoever may come within the circuit of this Tower, none enemies shall at any time have power to hurt him in body or soul. *Cadent a latere ejus mille et decem milia a dextris ejus, ad eum autem non appropinquabunt*. Therefore the penitent sinner must pray unto God with all his might, to the intent these said enemies craftily compass him not by their subtle means, and so let him from his good purpose. *Eripe me de inimicis meis, Domine; ad te confugi*: "Lord, deliver me from mine enemies. I come unto Thee for succour."

Last, every penitent sinner hath cause to fear lest peradventure his own frailty cause him to err again, which many do after they have entered the way of penance. And our frailty is so great that without the mercy of God we all should decline from the right way. St. Paul saith *Non enim volentis est nec currentis hominis sed miserationis Dei*. Man hath no power of himself; "it lieth not in his will to continue or do any goodness, but only by

the mercy of God." A certain wise man said: *Scivi quoniam aliter non possum esse continuus nisi tu dederis*: "Lord, I have always known for a surety that I cannot continue by any means in my good purpose without the help of Thee. St. Austin said unto Almighty God *Da quod jubes Domine: et jube quod vis*: "Lord, grant me to fulfil Thy commandments, and command me what Thou wilt"; as who saith, the will of God cannot be kept without His help. He made us and endued us with reason and free will because we should give heed and keep His commandments. He may require of us by a more just title anything that we can do, than any mortal Lord may of his servants; notwithstanding, he that hath dominion and rule in this world will straitly command his servants to fulfil his mind. For this let the penitent sinner make his prayer to God, saying *Doce me facere voluntatem tuam: quia Deus meus es tu*: "Lord, teach me to accomplish Thy will, for Thou art my God."

Hitherto is treated of the sinner's fall, also of his rising again, and in what manner his returning was. Third, we have spoken of his petition made to the Father. Now, in the fourth place, we shall speak of the reward which in conclusion he shall receive of his Father. What else shall a meek and merciful father do to his son, returning to him, with so great penance and full purpose to amend, but shortly bring him into his house? So the father of this Prodigal Child used himself to his son, commanded also his servants to clothe him new and prepare a great feast. Shall not our Heavenly Father do in like manner to a sinner returning to Him? Yes, without doubt; and much more, for He shall bring His child not into a house of a little circuit, but into His most large Kingdom, into the best and most plenteous country. Whosoever is once entered into it may never after err, or do amiss, for the which thing that Kingdom of God is here called *terra recta* "a land without err." In another place it is named *terra viventium*, "the land of everlasting life." Many times it is also called *regio vivorum*, "the region of them that shall live everlastingly." Many fathers there be, unto whom if their chil-

dren returned, that would cast them into strait prisons, there to be sore punished for their misliving. But our Heavenly Father, Whose spirit is much more meek,—as it is remembered by our Saviour in a Gospel, speaking to His disciples when they desired punishment on the Samaritans, He said to them *Nescitis cujus spiritus estis?* “Wot ye not of what spirit ye be?” As who saith, of a benign and gentle, not prone to do vengeance, but always ready to mercy. The Father of Heaven is of a meek spirit. It is written in the Book of Sapience: *O quam bonus et quam suavis, Domine, spiritus tuus in omnibus:* “Lord, how good and gentle is Thy spirit in all Thy works!” This gentle spirit of our Heavenly Father shall bring us into the land without error, into the region of eternal life. For He only is worthy to be named a Father *A quo omnis paternitas quæ in cælo et quæ in terra est, nominatur:* “Of whom every fatherhood both in heaven and earth hath his beginning and name.” In-somuch therefore as He above all other hath the name of a Father, therefore His dealing shall be the more meek and gentle unto us; so that the penitent may say, as followeth in the next verse. *Spiritus tuus bonus deducet me in terram rectam propter nomen tuum, Domine:* “Lord, Thy good spirit shall bring and lead me into the land of eternal pleasure,” not by mine own deserving, but “for Thine only name.” Moreover no doubt of it: this Prodigal Child was marvellously comforted and revived by the sweet consolatory words of his father, where before he was in manner dead and perished, as is shewed in the Gospel. *Filius meus mortuus fuerat et revixit:* “My child was dead and now is revived.” How is he revived? Truly, by the equity of his father. *Equitas* is called the thing that philosophers named *epieikeia*, which is properly the mind of the law. A judge ought rather to follow the mind of the law than the extremity of the words written in it. Else as Cicero said, *Summum ius summa injuria erit:* “The law, if used extremely after the words as they be written, shall be many times great wrong.” Example. Peradventure there is certain constitutions made in a city, by this manner. If, after a

certain hour in the night, any person ascend and come over the walls of the city, he shall suffer death. It fortuneth after, enemies to come and lay siege to that city, thinking for to get it the night following; which thing is unknown to all the citizens except one, that by chance was that night shut out of the gates. This man, knowing the counsel of those enemies, shortly climbeth over the walls of the city, giveth warning to all other citizens, and so by him the city is saved. Now according to the words of the law he should suffer death; notwithstanding, the mind of him which made that law was far contrary. Thus after justice written, he should die; but according to equity, he were worthy to have a great reward. Even so it is written among the laws and ordinances of God *Anima quæ peccaverit ipsa morietur*: "That soul that is sinful shall die eternally." If this said constitution and law should be observed according as the words do sound, few or none should be saved, since no creature was ever born without sin, few except. But the mind of this said law and institution is to be taken heed of more than the letter as it lieth; which mind and intent we may gather of other places in Scripture. Almighty God saith by His prophet Ezechiel *Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed ut convertatur et vivat*: "I will not the eternal death of a sinner, but that he be converted from his wicked disposition, and by his so doing come to everlasting life." Lo, Almighty God will this, this is his mind, that a sinner, being in deadly sin, is worthy to die eternally; but again if he forsake sin and by penance turn to that Blessed Lord, he shall be saved. This is the equity of this said law; whereof the penitent ought to take great comfort, and say that followeth, *Vivificabis me in æquitate tua*: "Lord, Thou shalt comfort me by the equity of Thy law." For whereas I by sin am dead spiritually, I shall remember it and call for mercy, and so be revived. The felicity and pleasure of the Heavenly City is marvellously great, for whosoever is once entered into it and made partaker of that great feast shall never after feel any misery, neither of body nor soul. First, the body shall never after be mortal.

Also, where it was originally brought forth in corruption, then it shall rise in incorruption without possibility of death. Our bodies be naturally feeble and weak, but then they shall rise with strength inenarrable. Further, as touching the deformity of the body, then it shall be all in glory, shining bright as the sun. Where also it is given unto sensuality, then it shall be all spiritual and the appetite continually obedient unto reason. No sloth or sluggishness shall then be in it, but all agility and quickness. No grossness, but it may pierce through any stone, be it never so thick; no spot, no blemish, but all shining in glory. The body shall then have no mind of any corruptible thing; for ever after it shall be immortal and impassible. It shall be at that time so spiritual that no rebellion may be between body and soul; none envy, nor desire to be exalted, no covetousness of riches shall then grieve the body; but every man glad of other, without all these said transitory things. Pleasure shall there be plenteous, for all shall be satiate continually with the river of all pleasure. The prophet saith *Satiabor quum apparuerit gloria tua*: "Blessed Lord, I shall be fulfilled and content when Thy joy shall appear"; that is to say, at such time as it shall be Thy pleasure to call me unto Thy kingdom. Moreover, in that celestial region is rest alway without trouble. There shall every man and woman be content to the uttermost without any murmur. But contrariwise, in the region and country of this world cannot be but trouble and irksomeness. For whether we conform ourself unto the world or forsake it so much as we may, yet shall we suffer great labours and affliction of the soul. I prove it by this question. Does not thou that art desirous to have worldly pleasures, come unto them by thousands and in manner innumerable laborious means? Also, when thou hast obtained thy will, dost thou not find as many divers ways to keep them? And, last, no man can tell how much it grieveth thee to remember how thou shalt leave all these pleasures: either to be taken away by force or any other chance. Such as give themselves to worldly volupties may well say *Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis et perditionis*

et ambulavimus vias difficiles: "We be made weary in the laborious way of iniquity to get worldly goods, and we have walked hard ways," that is to say, taken great pains upon us to have them continually in possession. For this cause every penitent after this life shall have the third commodity, which is this; he shall be utterly delivered from these great tribulations and come unto everlasting tranquillity and rest. Insomuch he ought to put his trust only in God, saying that followeth, *Educes de tribulatione animam meam*: "Lord, Thou shalt bring my soul out of all tribulation."

It is also shewed in the Gospel how some had envy that this Prodigal Child was so lovingly and mercifully entreated of his father. For his eldest brother, the which was at all times permanent and abiding in his father's household, took it grievously; also by the means of other servants had envy at it. By this we may perceive two kinds of adversaries. One is of such as think themselves to have deserved more than other; as they the which be occupied incessantly in doing good works and operations, without intermission of any deadly sin, and by that presume of their deserving. The other is of those that will entice a man to have envy. And they be devils, the which many times bring into the minds of good folks vain praises for their deservings. This thing we read done in another parable, where is shewed how they that were hired about noon of the day to work in the vineyard, received as much for their labour and travail as they the which had wrought all the whole day; wherefore some had envy and grudged against their household father at the payment of their wages. But he anon assuaged their envy with his answer, saying: *An non licet mihi quod volo facere?* "May not I do what I will?" Like manner, the elder brother of this Prodigal Child said *Ecce tot annis servio tibi et nunquam mandatum tuum præterivi, et nunquam dedisti mihi hædum ut cum amicis meis epularer: sed postquam hic filius tuus qui devoravit substantiam suam cum meretricibus venit, occidisti illi vitulum saginatum*: "Father, I have done thee service all the days of my life hitherto, and at all times kept thy com-

mandment, yet thou never gave unto me so much good as a kid for to make merry among my friends. But at the coming again of this Prodigal Child, which hath spent his substance with common women, following the sensual appetite of his body, thou hast killed a fat calf and made good cheer for his returning." Now ye perceive with how great indignation this elder brother took the forgiveness and pity exhibited to his younger brother by his good father. But this gentle father, seeing the disdainful mind of his eldest son, came unto him with sweet and soft words, saying *Fili, tu semper mecum es et omnia mea tua sunt: epulari autem et gaudere oportebat quia frater hic tuus mortuus erat et revixit, perierat et inventus est*: "Son, thou hast been with me continually, and all that I have is thine; be not wroth, for whereas thy brother was in manner dead, now he is revived; he was lost and now is found again. For this cause I could do no less but make merry and be joyous." On this manner our Heavenly Father shall answer our enemies, for the love of His penitent child, with cold and soft words, wherefore it followeth: *Et in misericordia tua disperdes inimicos meos*: "Blessed Lord, Thou shalt with mercy mitigate the envy of mine enemies," so that they shall have no power against me. This first kind of enemies shall perish and come to nought by process. But the other, which (as we said) is the envious kind of devils that daily and hourly be about to put into the minds of good folks this calumnious vice of envy and malice, shall utterly be destroyed. Without doubt these mortal enemies at all times lay wait with as many subtle crafts as they can, to catch good people into their dangers; they covet nothing more than to have souls in captivity, and so bring them into eternal damnation. They ever vex, scourge and crucify souls in this life, and their desire is to continue without end. When also they perceive a penitent sinner forsake his sinful life and mightily ascend unto the throne of virtue, with continuance in the same, in spite of them, then many times they stir such as would be good, unto the sin of envy: like as the servant enticed the elder brother when he said *Frater tuus venit, et occidit pater*

tuus vitulum saginatum quia saluum illum recepit: "Thy brother is come home; and for joy that he is returned safe and sound, thy father hath slain a fat calf." With the which words anon this elder brother was moved to indignation, and for anger would not come into the house. But after this life the penitent shall be endued with this other great commodity: that is to say, he shall never after be troubled with these said enemies. For they shall be cast down into the deep dungeon of hell for evermore. *Et perdes omnes qui tribulant animam meam*: "Blessed Lord, Thou shalt utterly confound mine enemies, which now put my soul to great tribulation." Our gentle Lord and Father shall give with a good will all these said commodities unto the penitent sinner which hath made himself God's servant, the servitude of the devil utterly abject and cast away. This most wise crafts-master, Almighty God, cannot but make recognition of His own handiwork, namely when the deformity and blotting is clean done away: that is to say when our sins, wherewith the devils made black our souls in the sight of God, be clean expelled by sorrow and penance. He cannot see penitent souls to perish. For why? They be His likeness. God created man of nought and made Him like His image; therefore man is a peculiar thing only impropered to God, for two causes: First, for by His power He was created of nought; Second, because he was like to His own image. But, beside these, our Lord may claim man for His own by a juster title, insomuch He bought him with so great a price: that is to say, with the precious Blood of His only Begotten Son. For this He may call him His own of right. Let the penitent sinner come to this Blessed Lord and say, "O my Lord God, behold Thy creature that Thou hast made to Thine image, which also Thou redeemed with the precious Blood of Thy Son. Make recognition of Thine own similitude. Help to put away all that is not of Thee. I beseech Thee be to me as rightwise as Thou hast been to other, succour me that am about to rise from sin and come unto Thee. Bring Thine own out of the miserable servitude of devils wherein it hath been put down a long season. Not because I am

Thy son, for of a truth I am unworthy so to be called, but *Quoniam ego servus tuus sum*: "because I am Thy servant."

Thus is the fall of the sinner into misery made open and shewed; also his rising again; what his petition shall be unto the Heavenly Father; and, last, how many great commodities he shall obtain. Which our Blessed Lord, Father of Mercy, grant unto us all. Amen.

Here endeth the exposition of the Seven Psalms. Imprinted at London in the Fleet Street, at the sign of the Sun, by Wynkyn de Worde, printer unto the most excellent princess, my lady the King's grandame. In the year of our Lord God 1509 the 12th day of the month of June.



